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Volume 52, Number 3, Spring 1999

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Volume 52, Number 3, Spring 1999

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TYPE & DESIGN
Irene Imfeld, Berkeley, CA

PRINTED IN USA BY
Allen Press, Lawrence, KS

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Film Quarterly (ISSN 0015-1386) is published quarterly by the University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94720. Periodicals postage paid at Berkeley, California, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian GST #R122058662. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Film Quarterly, University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720.

Subscriptions are $25 per year for individuals, $63 per year for institutions. Subscribers outside North America., add $20 for postage. Single issues are $6.50 for individuals, $18 for institutions. Domestic claims for nonreceipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days.

Subscription requests and requests for advertising rate cards should be sent to the Journals Department, manuscript enquiries to the Editor, Film Quarterly, at the University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720. Unsolicited manuscripts should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences —Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1994. ∞

Back issues subsequent to Volume 38 (1984-85) write to the University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720. This journal is printed on recycled paper. The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors only.

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Todd Berliner

Hollywood Movie Dialogue and the "Real Realism" of John Cassavetes

There's no such thing as a "good actor." What it is, you know, is an extension of life. How you're capable of performing in your life, that's how you're capable of performing on the screen.

—John Cassavetes[1]

Real life is another performance: Gena Rowlands as Myrtle in *Opening Night.*

John Cassavetes

Movie Dialogue and Hollywood Realism

You're at a crowded party, sipping a drink. A man you don't recognize walks toward you and, to your surprise, addresses you by name. You might say, "I've forgotten your name." You might say, "Have we met?" or "How do you know my name?" But more than likely you would not say, "You have me at a disadvantage." No one would, no one real. And no man, I bet, has ever said to his wife, "Darling, what's gotten into you? You're not yourself." And if a husband ever did say something so awkward, I doubt his wife would ever reply, "Yes, I am . . . for the first time in my life." In a real conversation, these lines would sound cheap, bizarre, but we hear them a lot in movies, often in good ones, and not just old ones. Does anyone believe that when police show up at a bank heist, the criminals say coolly, "We got company"? And has a real police detective ever said to a reticent witness, "You and I are going downtown for a little chat"? At no point in my life has anyone used these words with me: "I hope so, Todd. I hope so." In fact, I hardly ever hear anyone use my name at all in conversation. It would sound peculiar, yet in movies it happens all the time, and it sounds perfectly natural. Movie dialogue obeys its own customs. We accept it according to the terms of the cinema, not of reality.

The virtue of stock lines, lines that frequently appear in Hollywood movie dialogue but not in real speech, is their efficiency. Stock movie lines have familiar, well-defined meanings, and they succinctly tell us what to expect and how to react. A stock line, for instance, might indicate a change in a character or a turn in a scene ("I can't *take* it any more!" or "You're not going anywhere," or "It's so crazy it just might work"). Some lines indicate triumph, the final pronouncement in a contentious exchange. We know a winning line when we hear it ("I *do* care . . . more than you know." "When you come back, I won't be here"), and we all recognize losing lines too ("I am *not* crazy! You *must* believe me!" "I can stop anytime I want"), lines given to characters who have gotten themselves into desperate trouble. Some lines indicate that a commotion or confrontation will soon erupt ("It's quiet. *Too* quiet." "You have *one* wish left"). Because they have a musical rhythm or suggest closure, some stock lines enable a scene to end with a feeling of finality, avoiding a dramatic thud ("He's bound to slip up sometime, and when he does . . . I'll be there." "I got a feeling this is gonna be a lonnnnng night"). Lines have genres, just as movies have genres, and generic lines offer us the same comfort that genre in general provides: they tell us where we are and where we are going.

Most dialogue in American movies abides by conventions (some of which it shares with stage dialogue), rules of conversation that predate talkies and persist to

the present day. I want to look briefly at five of them because they are so prominent and because they will help my discussion of the dialogue in John Cassavetes' movies. Not all movie dialogue follows these conventions, but they pervade most Hollywood cinema.

1. *Dialogue in American movies either advances the plot or supplies pertinent background information.* Any number of examples would demonstrate this point. Here's a brief exchange from *Stagecoach* in which Lt. Blanchard of the U.S. Cavalry speaks with stagecoach driver Curly:

BLANCH. Captain Sickle has asked if you will deliver this dispatch in Lordsburg the moment you arrive. The telegraph line's been cut.

CURLY Sure.

BLANCH. We're going with you as far as the noon station at Dry Fork. There'll be troop cavalry there and they'll take you on to Apache Wells. From Apache Wells you'll have another escort of soldiers into Lordsburg. But you must warn your passengers that they travel at their own risk.

CURLY At their own risk? Well, what's the trouble, Lieutenant?

BLANCH. Geronimo.[2]

Dense with information, this passage perfectly exemplifies movie dialogue's narrative efficiency. The audience quickly learns (or has reaffirmed) the three destinations of the stagecoach, the fact that the telegraph is not working, that the coach must meet more than one escort, that the ride is risky, and that Geronimo is the source of danger. Not only does all of Lt. Blanchard's information eventually work its way into the plot, but audiences naturally assume it will. Imagine how odd it would be if, for instance, Geronimo never appeared in the movie.

2. *American movie dialogue tends to move in a direct line, often toward one character's triumph and another's defeat.* Characters frequently win or lose a scene by means of what they say, and the lines of some characters are designed to make those characters look bad and other characters look good. Take the following exchange from *Citizen Kane* between Kane and his stodgy financial manager, Mr. Thatcher:

THATCH. Tell me, honestly, my boy, don't you think it's rather unwise to continue this philanthropic enterprise, this "Inquirer" that is costing you a million dollars a year?

KANE You're right, Mr. Thatcher. I did lose a million dollars last year. I expect to lose a million dollars this year. I expect to lose a million dollars next year. You know, Mr. Thatcher, at the rate of a million dollars a year, I'll have to close this place in—sixty years.

Even the carefully timed rhythms and repetitions in Kane's lines tell us he will win this exchange. And, though his lines are as confident as Kane's, Thatcher's starchy, smug tone exposes him, in accordance with the poetic justness of movie dialogue, to Kane's witty and winning reply.

3. *Characters in Hollywood movies communicate effectively through dialogue.* Conversations in movies tend to stay on subject, and, unlike real people, movie characters usually listen to one another and say what they mean. *Double Indemnity* contains an exchange that displays the kind of precisely tuned rapport we expect between lovers in Hollywood movies. Phyllis Dietrichson meets with insurance salesman Walter Neff to discuss life insurance for her husband. We know where such conversations lead and Walter seems to as well. Their flirtation closes with these lines:

PHYLLIS There's a speed limit in this state, Mr. Neff—forty-five miles an hour.

WALTER How fast was I going, officer?

PHYLLIS I'd say around ninety.

WALTER Suppose you get down off your motorcycle and give me a ticket?

PHYLLIS Suppose I let you off with a warning this time?

WALTER Suppose it doesn't take?

PHYLLIS Suppose I have to whack you over the knuckles?

WALTER Suppose I bust out crying and put my head on your shoulder?

PHYLLIS Suppose you try putting it on my husband's shoulder?

WALTER That tears it. Eight-thirty tomorrow evening then?

PHYLLIS That's what I suggested

WALTER Will you be here too?

PHYLLIS I guess so. I usually am.

WALTER Same chair, same perfume, same anklet?

PHYLLIS I wonder if I know what you mean?

WALTER I wonder if you wonder?

Double Indemnity: Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck in precisely attuned rapport . . .

Phyllis and Walter communicate on many levels: They use the same tone (simultaneously seductive and antagonistic); there is a perfect exchange of sexually suggestive metaphors; they even replay each other's phrases and syntactic constructions. When the dialogue concludes with Walter's witty intimation, it seems as though their lines have been jointly working toward that moment all along.

4. *Whereas most real people adjust what they are saying as they speak, movie characters tend to speak flawlessly.* To offer examples of this convention would be an exercise in obviousness; I can better illustrate it through an instructive exception. David Mamet often scripts lines that mutate as they progress, and the fact that his dialogue often sounds so peculiar demonstrates the pervasiveness of the artificial norm. In the following line from *House of Games,* for instance, each of the last two phrases belongs to a syntax other than the one that leads into it: "You see, in my trade, this is called, what you did, you 'cracked-out-of-turn.'" The stammering syntax of many of Mamet's lines makes them similar to real speech, but, because they break a rule of movie dialogue, they sound awkward and mannered to those accustomed to conventional Hollywood dialogue.[3]

5. Of course one could find numerous film conversations that violate these rules; however, such exceptions themselves illuminate a fifth convention of American movie dialogue: *When a film breaks one of movie dialogue's rules, the transgression normally serves a direct narrative function.* If a conversation does not move in a clear direction, for instance, then the film typically invites the audience to notice the fact (consider the rambling conversation between George and Mary from *It's a Wonderful Life* in which a lack of direction reveals their nervousness and mutual attraction). Or, if two characters miscommunicate, the movie focuses on their inability to understand each other (take the scene in *Annie Hall* in which Alvy, trying to replicate the rapport he had with Annie, cooks lobster with his urbane date, a scene in which minor misunderstandings suggest that the speakers make a bad couple). Or if a character in a movie does not speak properly, then his verbal ineptitude might serve as a joke or quirk of character, or it may pose a problem he must overcome (Billy Bibbit's stutter in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). To make this point another way, when a movie violates movie-dialogue convention, the violation means something.

These five conventions point to a curious paradox about Hollywood movie dialogue: such dialogue may strike us as realistic, but it is most unlike real speech. This contradiction becomes more intelligible, though no less curious, once we understand "realism" to be not the authentic representation of reality but rather a type of art that masks its own contrivance. Movies may be no more real than other kinds of art, but they tend to *feel* more real. For all the beatings Bazin has taken for his conception of cinema's fundamental realism, he is essentially correct when he says that in the cinema "there is nothing to prevent us from identifying ourselves in imagination with the moving world before us, which becomes *the* world."[4] Hollywood movies in particular exploit film's powerful potential to engross us thoroughly in an alternate reality: They strive for an experience of total captivation, and they achieve it through a presentational style designed to draw audience members' attention away from the filmmaking process and keep them absorbed in the fiction.[5] Hollywood films are, therefore, "realistic" in the way Bill Nichols defines the term when he writes, "in

fiction, realism serves to make a plausible world seem real. . . . Realism in fiction is a self-effacing style, one that deemphasizes the process of its construction."[6]

Hollywood movie dialogue follows a similar design. Each of the conventions of movie dialogue tends to confine dialogue to the exigencies of the plot. Like the continuity system of editing, the conventions of Hollywood movie dialogue help maintain an unambiguous, efficient, purposeful, and uninterrupted flow of narrative information. Only rarely does movie dialogue cause us to feel disoriented or uncertain—feelings that are likely to make the dialogue itself the focus of our attention—and, when it does, the questions it raises pertain directly to the narrative (such as in a who-done-it or detective film). Sometimes, as in screwball comedy or film noir, we are asked to admire the witty banter of the script, but even in such movies, most of the dialogue invites us to pay attention not to the writing but to what the conversation has accomplished in the service of the plot. The effect of Hollywood movie dialogue's simplicity and economy, its tendency to explain everything, and its insistence that nothing said be incidental to the narrative—its "excessive obviousness," to paraphrase David Bordwell[7]—is that audiences tend to feel cozy when they hear it, un-anxious about going anywhere stylistically uncomfortable.

A real-life conversation will illustrate not only how unlike real speech movie dialogue really is but also how odd real dialogue would sound in a movie. The following real-life exchange comes from an article on conversation analysis, a branch of linguistic anthropology. Two teenagers, Bonnie and Jim, are talking on the telephone:

BONNIE hhh 'n I was wondering if you'd let me borrow your gun.

JIM My gun? . . . *What* gun?

BONNIE Donchuh have a beebee gun? . . .

JIM Yeah. aWhat I meant was *which* gun?

BONNIE Tch! hh Oh uhm t hhh, well d'j'have a really long one? . . .

JIM Why would you like a really long one?

BONNIE Y'don' have a really long one.

JIM What?

BONNIE Y'- Donchuh have a l- really long one?

JIM Yeahhh A- all I wan' to know why you want a gun.

BONNIE Oh oh. OH . . . Because I'm I'm doi— heheh hhh I am doing a pl- a thing hhh in drama. It's like kind of like you know what a pantomime is?

JIM Uhh hhh! Yeah. I know. . . . Yuh gonna be doin' it up on stage in front of the whole school?

BONNIE No. no. no. . . . Jis' in my drama class.

JIM Yeah I know. . . . I mean in your class when it ha hh like you do it at lunch?

BONNIE No uhm jis' do it during drama period. . . . Uhm and so I'm doing it off a record called "Annie Get your *Gun*" and it's called "Doin' What Comes Natchurly" an she's got a *gun.*

JIM An you're Annie hh.

BONNIE Yeah.

JIM Ehheheh hh. You a good uh actress?

BONNIE No heheheh?

JIM Th'n how d'ju come out to be Annie?

BONNIE No- I'n- it's jis' that everybody in the class has to do a different pantomime, you know?[8]

Were it to appear in a movie, this conversation would be highly unconventional; indeed, it violates all of the rules of movie dialogue mentioned above. The first two rules state that movie dialogue "either advances the plot or supplies pertinent background information" and that it "tends to move in a direct line, often toward one character's triumph and another's defeat." In a movie, an exchange that began "I was wondering if you'd let me borrow your gun" is likely to move in a dramatically different direction than it does here. This conversation has little direction at all (or drama). For instance, it slides from Bonnie's need to borrow Jim's gun to Jim's surprise (based on a misunderstanding) that Bonnie obtained the lead in a class performance. Rule 3 says that "characters communicate effectively through dialogue." Incidental miscommunications (such as Jim's belief that Bonnie has a lead role), so rare in movie dialogue, frequently pepper real conversation. In fact, almost all of Jim and Bonnie's statements either contain a misconception or are efforts to correct one. When Jim asks "What gun?", for instance, Bonnie thinks the question is rhetorical and that, with it, Jim is telling her that he does not own a gun (she replies, "Donchuh have a beebee gun?"); however, he is simply asking her what gun she wants to borrow ("What I meant was which gun?"). The rest of the dialogue continues the series of minor misunderstandings and corrections. Rule 4 says that movie characters, in contrast to real people, "tend to speak flawlessly." Bonnie and Jim's conversation provides several examples of the way real people continuously modify, mid-sentence,

their meanings and syntaxes: "Y' Donchuh have a l- really long one?" "It's like kind of like you know what a pantomime is?" "I mean in your class when it ha hh like you do it at lunch?" Of course, none of the traits in the exchange "serves a direct narrative function" (rule 5) because, in the absence of an overriding plot, such traits are only incidental to the conversation.

My larger point about the passage is not as strictly demonstrable, but I think it is persuasive: The conversation between Bonnie and Jim is a real conversation, and yet, presented in a scripted form, it seems stranger than the dialogue cited from movies. Indeed, all the instances in which Bonnie and Jim's exchange violates the conventions of movie dialogue—the awkward syntaxes, the minor misunderstandings, the rambling and incidental insertions—call so much attention to themselves (because we are not used to paying attention to them) that they make real speech sound artificial. The effect is common: Real life often seems alien when represented in art. Hollywood movie dialogue guards against such alienation precisely through its unreal form of realistic speech—speech which, though demonstrably contrived, gives off an air of reality.

Rambling, undefined, and filled with incidentals, the dialogue in the films of John Cassavetes more closely resembles the exchange between Bonnie and Jim than it does conventional movie dialogue, yet Cassavetes manages to avoid the affectedness that results when art represents reality too faithfully. He does so by employing a peculiar brand of realism, one that differs from the kind normally found in American movies.

Unlike most American filmmakers, Cassavetes does not always mask the art of his films, and thus he sometimes reminds his audiences that they are watching a movie. His goal, however, is not to point out the falsity of cinematic representations, as is the goal of such filmmakers as Robert Altman and Brian De Palma when they expose their films' artifice. On the contrary, for Cassavetes, art is an extension of real life. By that I mean not merely that the plots and characters of Cassavetes' films are plausible or that they mimic reality, but that a Cassavetes film itself often seems no different from a natural, real-life event and that one cannot always distinguish between a Cassavetes film *as* a film and the fictional events depicted in it. Hence his movies seem at once highly real and highly contrived.

Two films that exemplify Cassavetes' aesthetic will help to explain and prove this paradoxical assertion. *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974) illustrates Cassavetes' talent for writing movie dialogue that blurs the distinction between actors and characters, calling attention to the actors as actors and hence to the film as film. With regard to the larger question of realism in Cassavetes films, *Opening Night* (1978) demonstrates in a dramatic form that, in a Cassavetes movie, real life and art are the same thing.[9]

Cassavetes Dialogue

John Cassavetes' dialogue comes so close to real speech that it often sounds peculiar, like ad-libbing. Many people think Cassavetes films are, in fact, ad-libbed, but they are not. His first film, *Shadows* (1959), closes with the caption, "The film you have just seen was an improvisation." But even *Shadows* was not improvised in the way the word suggests. The actors did not make up their scenes as they went along. Cassavetes means that, developing the story in workshops, he and the actors never used a written script. However, they worked on those scenes for months before shooting them; they just never wrote down what they came up with. For all his later films, Cassavetes wrote complete scripts, and, although he and the actors changed the scripts in rehearsals, they rarely improvised on camera. Sometimes a crew member acted as a stenographer, taking down what Cassavetes and the actors made up in rehearsals so that they could reproduce it during filming. Gena Rowlands—Cassavetes' wife, who acted in most of his films—said, "We do use improvisation, but not as widely as people think. We start with a very complete script. . . . Then [Cassavetes] will go and rewrite it—it's not just straight improvisation. I'm asked a lot about this, and it's true, when I look at the films and I *see* that they look improvised in a lot of different places where I know they weren't."[10]

Cassavetes seems to have sought the effect of improvisation without relying much on improvisation in the shooting process. Why would a filmmaker seek such an effect? My first answer—dialogue that sounds improvised sounds more like real speech—is perhaps too simple, but let us explore it in relation to a conversation from *A Woman Under the Influence.*

Nick's Longhetti's wife, Mabel, has had a mental breakdown, and he has committed her to an institution. The next day he inadvertently causes a coworker, Eddie, to fall down the side of a hill at their work site. Almost frenzied, Nick then takes his kids and another coworker, Vito, to the beach. The following exchange occurs as Vito and Nick walk along the beach with the kids:

VITO What a day, Nick. I haven't been to the beach without my wife in—twelve years. I used to live in the water when I was a kid. Fish, they

called me. I was thin, see, lips all blue, shaking. I was always lookin' for girls. My kids, they're all grown up now. My brother, Marco, he's a college graduate, communist. Couldn't keep a job. Too many big ideas. Reads too much. I say, let the girls read. They love to read. You know what I mean?

NICK Okay, let's enjoy ourselves. Okay?

VITO Okay.

NICK I want to talk to my kids too.

VITO Talk to your kids? They never listen. Why should they listen? *I* never listened. Did *you* listen? I mean, did *you* listen?

NICK All right, right here. Come on, up here, we'll plop down right here. Come on. Come on. Come on.

VITO Hey Nick, I'm usually a lot of fun, right? But to see a guy like Eddie fall and break all his bones, holy shit, I mean what a fall.

NICK All right, knock it off, will you? We're here to have a good time. We're having a good time. We came to play with the kids. So let's play with the kids. Otherwise, we go home.

This conversation, which comprises almost the entire scene, follows the lines that appear in Cassavetes' original shooting script practically word for word.[11] However, it sounds improvised because, violating the normal conventions of movie dialogue, it is as inefficient and rambling as real speech.

Movie dialogue tends to move in a direct line. One of the qualities that makes this passage sound so authentic is that, like the passage between real teenagers Bonnie and Jim, this one slides from topic to topic without direction. Consider Vito's first monologue. His opening lines ("I used to live in the water when I was a kid.") suggest that he will tell Nick something about his childhood. The speech starts to ramble when Vito says, "My kids, they're all grown up now," which has the word "kid" in it and therefore sounds as though it might relate to the story he has begun, but the line ends up logically irrelevant to anything that precedes or follows. "My brother, Marco" echoes "my kids" of the previous sentence in a way that, again, sounds meaningful, but only at first. "He's a college graduate" leads naturally to "reads too much" which in turn leads to "let the girls read," echoing Vito's earlier statement that he was "always lookin' for girls." Although each sentence resonates with sentences that precede (words are repeated, ideas meld into one another), the lines do not add up to any coherent story. Lacking a clearly identifiable focus and progressing from association to association, the speech mimics the rambling quality of thought.

Whereas most real people adjust what they are saying as they speak, movie characters tend to speak flawlessly. The rambling quality in Cassavetes' dialogue is evident even at the sentence level. For instance, "But to see a guy like Eddie fall and break all his bones, holy shit, I mean what a fall" changes syntaxes mid-sentence, as though Vito were thinking of what he has to say as he says it, not simply before.

Gena Rowlands in
Woman Under the Influence

Characters in Hollywood movies communicate effectively through dialogue. The incoherence and lack of direction in Vito's story can be seen as well in the interactions between the two characters. Vito and Nick listen to each other just enough to continue conversation, repeating each other's words (for instance, when Nick says he wants to talk to his kids, Vito responds that kids don't listen), but clearly not communicating. While the exchange between, say, Walter Neff and Phyllis Dietrichson has a clearly identifiable tone, it is difficult to describe an overall tone for Nick and Vito's scene because each character sets his own tone: Vito sounds laid back and philosophical, whereas Nick seems hyperactive and uptight. It is as though Vito is in one kind of scene and Nick in another.

M*ovie dialogue advances the plot.* The only portion of the exchange that relates to the film's plot is the discussion of Eddie's fall, but it is buried among lines to which the scene gives equal weight. Besides, this scene is the last we hear of the injury, which becomes, finally, a narrative dead end.

When a film breaks one of movie dialogue's rules, the transgression normally serves a direct narrative function. The most peculiar thing about this passage is that none of the violations of dialogue convention has an evident purpose in the movie. The scene is not even about Nick and Vito's inability to communicate; their miscommunications have little to do with the plot of the film and are, in any case, too subtle to give the scene focus.

The exchange thus lacks the chief quality that distinguishes movie dialogue from real speech: a sense that someone wrote the lines with a clear dramatic intention. The five conventions I have discussed point to a *design* behind Hollywood movie dialogue, and Cassavetes dialogue, by violating them, lacks this sense of an implied scriptwriter. Like the exchange between Bonnie and Jim, Nick and Vito's scene seems to have no creative hand controlling the characters, encouraging us to focus our attention, directing the dialogue toward a defined conclusion, and giving the scene meaning. Because it feels unanchored by an overt authorial intention, *A Woman Under the Influence* seems as though it could go just about anywhere, as though Cassavetes' actors might say anything that occurs to them.

I am uncomfortable with what I have said about this passage because I just finished arguing that dialogue that mimics real speech is not realistic, yet this dialogue, though unconventional, has an air of reality. So why doesn't Cassavetes' effort to mimic the haphazardness of real conversation seem like the ultimate contrivance? To answer that question, we need to think more about the effect of improvisation.

Conspicuous improvisation tends to call attention to the artistic process because it encourages audiences to notice not just the behavior of the characters but also that of the actors playing them. But improvisation is not solely the activity of professional performers; when real people speak, most of the time they are improvising. Hence actors who appear to be improvising also appear to behave more like real people. Indeed, Cassavetes films not only seem improvised, but they frequently concern characters who themselves seem to be improvising, and one cannot easily distinguish one kind of improvisation from the other. We can see here the germ of an alternative form of realism to the kind one normally finds in American movies, a realism created not by concealing one's art but by revealing the similarity between the act of creating art and the act of living.[12]

In capturing the artistic quality of real life, Cassavetes films exploit the resonances between the systems of representation within both drama and reality. Though I have only indirect statements to support the contention (such as the quotation that opens this essay), I suspect that Cassavetes saw real life as a kind of performance, that in his films he sought to represent people in the act of representing themselves, and that he intended us to blend actorial behavior with the behavior of the characters his actors impersonate. But whether or not he intended the effect, the feeling of actorial improvisation, when coupled with characters who seem to make up their statements as they go along, serves to combine actor and role (and hence art and reality) far more thoroughly than with more conventional, tightly constructed dialogue.

In the following brief speech, Mama Longhetti, Nick's mother, is speaking to a group of people Nick has invited to the house in honor of Mabel's return from the mental hospital. Angered by her son's stupidity in having such a party, she makes the following announcement to the guests:

> Everybody please. Quiet in here, please. Now you know Nicky loves you all. *I* love you all. Now you should know better to come here on a day like this when Mabel's coming out of the hospital. I'm not blaming you, but I'm saying the girl'll be here any minute, and you must go home, immediately! Please.

Mama says a number of inconsistent things in this quick speech. She thinks, understandably, that people might feel offended when she kicks them out of the house, so

she prefaces her remarks with "Now you know Nicky loves you all." Right after she says the line, however, she seems to realize that it implies that only Nick—and not she—loves the guests. So she adds another line, "*I* love you all." But Mama also wants to register her disapproval of the party: "Now you should know better to come here on a day like this when Mabel's coming out of the hospital." Just as she does, however, she acknowledges that it is not the fault of the guests that they were invited to the party, adding, "I'm not blaming you." Again she has compensated for what she has already said, even though she has indeed just blamed them for coming to the party. (A missing word—"you should know better *[than]* to come here"—furthermore makes logical mush out of her meaning.) Similarly, she compensates for the aggressiveness implicit in the line, ". . . you must go home, immediately!" with the more modest "please." Mama continually says things that do not sound right to her, and she makes up for it by trying to alter the implication of what she just said. The result is an impression of improvisation—making it up as she goes along. It is important to note, however, that the same point could be made about Katherine Cassavetes, the actor playing Mama Longhetti, since such extemporaneous adjustments are as indicative of actorial improvisation as they are of real speech. Cassavetes' dialogue tends to focus on precisely those moments when the two forms of improvisation become impossible to delineate.

Another example: Earlier in the picture, after Nick has stood her up, Mabel spends the night with a stranger, Garson Cross. In the morning, upset and behaving irrationally, Mabel goes into the bathroom, and Garson yells at her through the bathroom door:

> I'm gonna have to leave in a minute now. Listen, if this Nick fellow's on your mind and you consider me some kind of a threat to him, or if you're trying to punish him with me or me with him, forget it! I never met the man! And don't blame yourself for me if that's what you're doing.

As in Mama Longhetti's speech, the tone and substance of this speech—which, incidentally, follows the shooting script verbatim—transform as it progresses. When Garson says, "Listen, if this Nick fellow's on your mind and you consider me some kind of threat to him," he seems about to say something like "then don't worry about me; I'll leave and never bother you again." But the first part of his sentence fails to predict where his sentence in fact goes. Suddenly, Garson chastises Mabel for what he fears she might be contemplating: "or if you're trying to punish him with me or me with him, forget it!" The "forget it" and "I never met the man" follow logically from the second part of the sentence but do not make sense with the sentence's original clause. Garson has changed his mind mid-sentence about what he wants to say to Mabel. "And don't blame yourself for me if that's what you're doing" is another adjustment, making sure now that Mabel does not feel guilty. Garson adds to his sentences until they say everything he wants them to say, even if what he finally says clashes with what he said when he started speaking.

It would not have mattered whether these two speeches had been scripted or not; they certainly *feel* improvised. Moreover, one cannot know whether to attribute the feeling to the behavior of the actors or to that of the characters. One can see now why an air of actorial improvisation was so attractive to Cassavetes: it accomplishes the very blending of art and reality that he sought to achieve.

Opening Night and Real Realism

The confusion of actor and role in Cassavetes' movies occurs not solely because, as improvisers, his actors appear to behave like regular people; such confusion results also from Cassavetes' interest in the theatrical nature of real life. Cassavetes movies often focus, for instance, on people who play roles, make scenes, people who try to direct, write or, most commonly, improvise a script. Consider Mabel's efforts to perform the role of wife that Nick wants her to play ("Tell me how you want me to be. I can be that. I can be anything"), or six-year-old Phil in Cassavetes' *Gloria* (1980), posturing and talking like a Hollywood gangster ("He don't know the score. He sees a dame like you and a guy like me. He don't know"), or the stage shows in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976/1978), or, near the end of the film, Cosmo's "performance" for his performers, who have no idea he is shot and bleeding to death. But nowhere is the theatrical quality of real life more evident than in *Opening Night,* a movie about people who act, direct, and write dramatic fiction for a living.

Better than any other film, *Opening Night* defines Cassavetes' aesthetic, which could be summarized thus: *Don't bother about the distinctions between reality and fiction, between actor and role, or between script and improvisation; none of those categories holds up. Opening Night* not only dramatizes the disintegration of those categories, but it also prevents its audience from maintaining them. More than any other Cassavetes movie,

Zohra Lampert
and Gena Rowlands
in *Opening Night*

Opening Night makes real life and art seem like the same thing.

The film stages the similarity between two realities contained in all fiction: the reality of the fiction (Phyllis Dietrichson, say, wants to kill her husband; she enlists the help of insurance salesman Walter Neff, etc.) and the *real* reality, the reality that the fiction is just a fiction (Phyllis is played by an actor, Barbara Stanwyk, in the film *Double Indemnity,* etc.). *Opening Night* in fact contains three realities, since those two realities are themselves depicted in the film. The plot concerns a group of theater professionals working on a play, and—as is often the case in movies about the theater (e.g., *A Double Life, Kiss Me Kate, Mephisto, The Dresser*)—several particulars from the film and the play mirror one another. For example, both *Opening Night* and the play the movie frames, *The Second Woman,* deal with aging, love, and violence. Myrtle Gordon, a fictional stage actress (played by Gena Rowlands), has difficulty with the violence she encounters both offstage and on, and both Myrtle and her character in the play, Virginia, have trouble coming to terms with getting older. The title of the play refers to the "second woman" that emerges in Virginia as she ages. Within the framing fiction, however, that title also recalls the fan, Nancy, whom Myrtle sees killed in a car crash and who literally haunts Myrtle throughout the movie. Specific scenes from the movie and the play echo each other. For instance, shortly after Myrtle visits Nancy's family during a funeral ceremony at the family's apartment, Virginia, on stage, visits her ex-husband Maurice and his family at their apartment. Both visits are unexpected and unwelcome, and in each scene the families admonish Myrtle/Virginia for coming. In another scene from the movie, Maurice (played by Cassavetes) says to Myrtle, "You're not a woman to me anymore." A little later during rehearsals, Marty (the character Maurice performs in the play) says to Virginia, "You don't get to me." The lines are similarly phrased, and both declare her lack of power over him. The movie supplies dozens of other themes, lines, scenes, and characters that appear both in one reality (the story of *Opening Night*) and the other (that of *The Second Woman*).

The similarity between the realities depicted in the film—and this effect is also typical for movies about plays, as well as for movies about movies—establishes a special kind of connection between the film and its real-life audience. Films about plays in a sense "reach out" to their audiences because of the resonance between, on the one hand, the play's relation to the film and, on the other, the film's relation to the real world (the world in which we are audience members sitting in a theater watching a movie). In the language of an SAT analogy, *Opening Night* is to *The Second Woman* as the real world is to *Opening Night.* The movie and the play, for instance, are both fictional dramas, both performed by the same real-life actors, and we, the moviegoing audience, are like the fictional theatergoers depicted in the film. Cassavetes and Rowlands are, famously, husband and wife in real life; they play former lovers in the movie; and in the play they play lovers who seem about to break up.

Cassavetes exploits the complex relations among these three realities (the reality of the play, the movie, and the real world) by frequently confusing them in our minds. Audiences, for instance, often cannot tell the play from the movie. Most of the examples of this confusion are so brief and, taken individually, so incidental that they might seem hardly worth mentioning, but together they comprise a continuous flow of

analogous ambiguities. For instance, when Myrtle makes one of her stage entrances as Virginia, for a moment the movie deludes us into thinking she has broken character. The screen shows a close-up of Myrtle's face as she enters the stage and the theatergoers clap for her. She appears to turn to the audience, smile, and nod, acknowledging their applause. A second later—after the camera cuts to a shot of another character, Lena—we realize that Myrtle did not nod to the theatergoers, but to her. Myrtle had not broken character at all; it just looked to us as though she had. During another performance of the play, Lena says to Virginia sternly, "What kind of woman are you?" Myrtle looks so shaken by the question that we must wonder whether we are watching the face of the actor or of the character she portrays. On opening night in New York, when Myrtle looks too drunk to perform, she appears to turn to the audience mid-scene and say, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry." Is she stopping the play? The placement of the camera behind Myrtle, who appears to be looking out at the audience, encourages us to think so. As the performance continues, however, we soon feel confident that Myrtle, in character, had in fact apologized to the other characters in the scene.

Confusion about whether the actors are in character or not persists throughout the movie and makes watching *Opening Night* an uneasy experience, an uneasiness the film inherits from live theater. Normally, filmgoers need not worry about live errors (such as a faulty prop or a missed cue), whereas, at a play, something can go wrong at any minute and disrupt the drama's fine balance betwen fiction and real life. *Opening Night* incorporates that danger, even heightening it by establishing Myrtle as a volatile actor, one who has difficulty with particular scenes and who defiantly breaks character when upset, and we frequently have trouble distinguishing between the play and Myrtle's own unscripted outbursts.

Our questions arise not only when we watch the characters on stage: we experience similar confusions watching them in their "real" lives, since they often appear to be acting even in the absence of a theater audience. At times Maurice seems more affected off-stage than on, humoring Myrtle, smiling at her when we know he can't stand her. Manny Victor is the director of the play, but he seems more like an actor in life. He tells Myrtle on the phone, "There is no one I love more than you at this moment." He then covers the receiver, turns to his wife, Dorothy (Zorah Lampert), who is sitting in the room with him, and says, "You know I love you." Which is the act, what he says to Myrtle or what he says to his wife, or both? The playwright, Sarah Goode (Joan Blondell), performs and dissembles as frequently as the other characters. She hates Myrtle for sabotaging her play, and at one point both we and Myrtle overhear Sarah say, "that little bitch." Sarah then immediately turns to Myrtle, who has arrived unexpectedly, and, in a voice that sounds as phony as her curse sounded sincere, says, "There you are. Now, don't be worried. Promise? Don't be nervous. I'll call you." Acting emerges as a condition of life, not simply the activity of performers on stage.[13]

The ghost story within *Opening Night* engenders similar confusions of fiction and reality, causing us to ask whether the ghost is real or Myrtle's fantasy. For instance, when Myrtle visits Melva Drake, a spiritualist, for a seance, the movie tricks us into thinking that the spiritualist might see the dead girl. We see all three women—Myrtle, Melva, and Nancy—in the room together, an amazed look on Melva's face. After a long, violent fight between Nancy and Myrtle, we finally realize that Myrtle alone saw her, and our question remains unanswered, as it does for the remainder of the film.

One scene most tellingly illustrates the ways in which the film connects all these confusions of realities—play vs. movie, movie vs. real world, real self vs. role, ghost vs. fantasy. After a fight with Manny, Myrtle runs into her hotel bathroom and we see her washing her face at the sink. Not until the camera pans do we realize that the figure at the sink was not Myrtle but Nancy, who has appeared unexpectedly. Nancy then says to Myrtle: "I like the music. It's a nice, soothing sound." As she speaks, jazz music is in fact playing on the sound track, but audiences have no way of knowing whether Nancy has said these lines in response to the music she hears in the bathroom or whether the music is the film's non-diegetic representation of Nancy's words. Moreover, her statement might have nothing to do with that music, which might simply be the film's score, placed in the scene to create mood and thematically unrelated to Nancy's line. In what reality does that music exist? The music fades just before Manny walks into the bathroom, and we see the two women from his perspective as they both look up at him. The shot encourages us to ask, "Is the ghost real? Does he see Nancy too?" and, for a moment, the movie leaves such questions unanswered. Myrtle says, "If only I could rid myself of you," a line she could be directing toward either Manny or the ghost. Manny appears similarly confused: "What the hell are you doing? Are you going over your lines?" Just as we cannot tell whether Myrtle is speaking to Manny or to her fantasy, Manny cannot tell whether Myrtle is in the real world

or the world of the play. Myrtle then says, "If I could rid myself of the thought of being your wife." The statement clarifies that Myrtle is not addressing the ghost; however, it raises a new ambiguity: Because the line fits within the story of *The Second Woman*—in which Virginia, unable to move beyond her past, visits her ex-husband—Myrtle might in fact be rehearsing her lines (or pretending to), just as Manny guesses. Manny's disgusted expression clarifies that she is speaking to him. The clarification, however, raises other questions: Why does Myrtle think of herself as Manny's wife? Were they previously married, or does Myrtle feel wedded to Manny in her imagination? Almost every line, every sound, and every shot in this brief scene either clears up an ambiguity or creates a new one—many do both—linking several similarly unresolved questions about ghosts, fantasies, realities, performance, and identity.[14]

I argued earlier that, in a Cassavetes film, art and reality are so thoroughly blended as to be, at times, indistinguishable. *Opening Night* not only gives audiences the accustomed experience of a Cassavetes film, it takes that experience as its subject. Indeed, the questions we ask about the performances of *The Second Woman,* the questions we ask about the characters in *Opening Night,* and the questions those characters ask about one another are the same questions people generally ask about Cassavetes movies: Who is controlling what happens? Are the actors improvising or following a script? When are they acting and when playing themselves? All Cassavetes movies offer instances of what this movie is about: the impossibility of differentiating art from real life.

Indeed, one of the astonishing things about *Opening Night* is that it depicts people who behave a lot like people watching a Cassavetes movie: audience's responses to the characters often mirror precisely those characters' responses to themselves and to one another. Take, for instance, Myrtle, who has the most difficult time of anyone maintaining a clear grasp on reality and even on her own identity. "I somehow seem to have lost the, uh, the reality of, of, of the uh—the reality," she says in rehearsals. "I'm not myself." In an apparent effort to compensate for her confusion, she vigorously asserts the distinction between fantasy and real life. She says, for instance, that she is too different from Virginia to perform the part successfully ("She's very alien to me"); however, it is clear to us and to some of the characters that, on the contrary, she identifies too strongly with Virginia. The cruelty of the play, the play's lack of hope, and Virginia's aging make it difficult for Myrtle to separate her identity from that of her character, who has to deal with problems Myrtle dodges and denies in her own life. During more than one performance of the play, Myrtle steps out of the fictional reality and into the real one in a seemingly desperate effort to keep those realities straight in her mind. For instance, when Marty (the stage character played by Maurice) slaps Virginia (played by Myrtle), Myrtle collapses, stands up and says to him: "Don't be afraid. I love you. You're a wonderful actor, Maurice. We must never forget this is only a play." Calling attention to the play's contrivance, the line both asserts the distinction between fiction and reality and admits Myrtle's difficulty doing so.

Acting emerges as a condition of life, not simply the activity of performers on stage. Ben Gazzara (left) with Rowlands and Cassavetes.

Maurice's slap provides several other examples of the way characters in the movie, like the movie's audience, struggle to distinguish reality from fantasy. We first hear of Myrtle's objections to the slap when Manny talks to her about it on the phone: "There's nothing humiliating about it. Well, you're on the stage for chrissake. I mean, he's not slapping you for real." It remains unclear whether Myrtle finds the slap humiliating to her, the actress, Myrtle Gordon, or to her, the character, Virginia, but in either case she cannot distinguish a stage slap from a slap "for real." In rehearsals, she cannot even make it through the scene. When Maurice just gestures to hit her, she falls to the stage floor. David, the play's producer, thinks Myrtle is acting. He claps and yells "Bravo," as Myrtle screams, "No more!" But Myrtle really is distraught, a fact that slowly dawns on him.

When Maurice slaps Myrtle during a real performance, she again falls, and the theatergoers, like David, do not realize that her collapse has no proper place in the drama. Improvising, Maurice says, "Virginia, I didn't hit you that hard." Clearly he is speaking to Myrtle, but he addresses the line to Virginia: Maurice plays the same trick on the playgoing audience that the movie periodically plays on us, making them believe that he and Myrtle are in character when in fact they are out. Over and over, the film portrays characters who, like its audience, work vigilantly but unsuccessfully to maintain a firm grasp on reality, on fiction, and on the difference between the two.[15]

The end of the movie substantiates my thesis that *Opening Night* defines Cassavetes' aesthetic philosophy and that at the heart of that philosophy is a concept we might call "real realism"—the notion that art can be both highly real and highly contrived.

The ending sends a message—don't worry about the differences between reality and fiction, or script and improvisation—that belies the very unsettling experiences the film has worked so hard to give us. Indeed, if one did not care whether Myrtle's ghost is real or fantasy or which parts of the play were accidental and which parts intentional, and if one did not question whether Cassavetes' actors were improvising or following a script, or whether they were acting or just "playing themselves," then *Opening Night* would require little work at all. Of course, we do care about such distinctions and Cassavetes knows it. However, *Opening Night* demonstrates a way of thinking about art in which "art" disappears as a category separate from real life. In the film's climactic scene, Myrtle and Maurice harmoniously combine reality and fiction through an act of improvisation.

As I have said, when actors improvise, they behave like people in real life. But an improvisation itself is a fantasy, since the actors are still pretending to be people other than themselves. Improvisation combines reality and fiction in an uncontrolled mixture of the actors' own identities and the identities of the roles they perform. It is a lot like life, at least as Cassavetes likes to depict it.

As we watch Myrtle and Maurice in the play's New York opening, we gradually get the sense that they have left the script and are making up their performance as they go along. The moment is tense at first because we are not sure what will happen to Sarah's play and because Maurice and Myrtle, performing on stage, seem to be in the middle of a real fight. Already realities have been blended, but Cassavetes never misses an opportunity to blend them further. Just as moviegoers see their experience represented on the screen, just as the characters in the movie act in a play that mimics their own lives, and just as the drama, *Opening Night,* is about the making of a drama, Maurice and Myrtle's performance—which calls conspicuous attention to the actors as actors—at times concerns performance itself and the very predicament in which they find themselves as actors:

MAURICE I am restless—ha ha ha ha—with this pose.

MYRTLE Well, I am not me.

MAURICE And I know that I am someone else!

MYRTLE Do you think I am too?

MAURICE Yes.

MYRTLE Okay, it's definite then. We've been invaded. There's someone posing here as us.

As Maurice and Myrtle joke about posing and being other than themselves, their exchange comments on the questions of identity and reality that reverberate throughout the movie. For instance, the lines call attention to the mixing of realities that occurs in dramatic fiction, in which one person pretends to be another ("Well, I am not me." "And I know that I am someone else!").

After a lot of bickering, the scene on stage ends with a sort of comic foot-shake between the two characters/actors, and all the performers, now beaming, come out for bows. The scene is an emblem for the entire movie (and hence for Cassavetes movies in general). Here we find real realism depicted in almost textbook form: acting that announces itself as acting and that also works through real situations. The moment not only brings together the play's characters, Virginia and Marty, but also the actors playing them,

Maurice and Myrtle. It concludes the play for the fictional theatergoers in the audience, as well as providing a conclusion for us, the film's audience. Indeed the scene blends the realities of the film so harmoniously that I doubt the distinctions between them still matter to us.

But the most remarkable thing about this performance is that, whereas the trial performances in New Haven flopped, this one succeeds. The audience, laughing and clapping thunderously for the actors, appears to love it. (Incidentally, the "fictional" audience in the theater was, in fact, a real one. Cassavetes advertised in the newspaper for people who would dress up and watch some actors perform scenes from a play. He did not tell audience members when to laugh or applaud because he wanted spontaneous reactions.) Myrtle seems to have started the impromptu for pure spite ("I'm gonna bury that bastard," she says before going on stage), but, unlike earlier scenes in which Maurice fought Myrtle's attempts to stray from the play as written, here he plays along with her on-stage improvisations. Dorothy sits in the audience with a look of amazed delight. Even Manny, who has always grown furious whenever Myrtle has diverged from the script, looks as though he is beginning to enjoy the "play." The film concludes with a triumphant party backstage as members of the audience congratulate the performers. In the end, *Opening Night* encourages us to do what Maurice and the theatergoers do, what Dorothy does, and what Manny learns to do as he sits back and enjoys the show: accept that art, like life, is spontaneous and uncontrolled. One may consider the end of this movie Cassavetes' advice to us, his audience, whom he persistently prevents from making the kinds of distinctions that our experience with art has accustomed us to making. In a Cassavetes film, fiction can be as real as reality and real life is another performance.

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Notes

1. Grover Lewis, *Academy All the Way* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1974), 115.
2. Quotations from movies are my transcriptions, unless designated otherwise.
3. Other lines from *House of Games* with shifting syntaxes include, "Man, you're living in the dream, your questions, 'cause there is a real world," and "You threatened to kill a friend of mine. . . . Whether you mean it or not, and it's irrelevant to me, because you aren't going to do it." All three lines are spoken as Mamet wrote them in his shooting script. Cf. David Mamet, *House of Games: The Complete Screenplay* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985), 67, 10, and 13.
4. André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema—Part Two," *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 102.
5. Numerous scholars have described Hollywood's "invisible style." For a brief and lucid discussion, see David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 162–64.
6. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 165. Investigating the history of the term "realism" inevitably leads one to a paradox: On the one hand, realism signifies the portrayal of reality as it really is (see the writings of Sergei Eisenstein, Cesare Zavattini, and John Grierson). But, on the other, realism is a form of representation that masks reality in order to give us the *illusion* of reality (Nichols, Raymond Williams, Richard Maltby): We register something as real because the apparatus for representing it has been hidden from us—realism is a form of deceit. Cassavetes situates himself between these two notions of realism, producing art that is both like life as well as contrived.
7. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 3–11.
8. Emanuel A. Schegloff, "On the Organization of Sequences as a Source of 'Coherence' in Talk-in-Interaction," *Conversational Organization and Its Development,* ed. Bruce Dorval (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1990), 56–58. In addition to shortening the quotation for convenience, I have altered it some since it appears originally in a technical transcription notation.
9. When I say "Cassavetes films," I am referring to the ones over which he had complete control, not the films he made early in his career for the studios—*Too Late Blues* (1962) and *A Child Is Waiting* (1963)—nor *Big Trouble* (1986), which he directed simply for the money. *Gloria* (1980) falls somewhere between a Cassavetes film and the other type. "I wrote the story to sell, strictly to sell," Cassavetes said in an interview. "It was no great shakes" (James Stevenson, "John Cassavetes—Film's Bad Boy," *American Film* 5 [January/February, 1980], 48). But Columbia wouldn't buy the script unless he also agreed to direct it, which he did, after reworking the script and turning the film into something he was willing to have his name on.
10. Judith Crist, *Take 22: Moviemakers and Moviemaking* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984), 256.
11. The exchange in the script reads as follows:

    VITO What a day. Haven't been to the beach without my wife in twenty-three years. I used to live in the water when I was a kid. Fish, they used to call me. I was skinny, see, lips all blue, shaking, looking for girls. . . . Yeah, my kids are grown now. My son, Marco, is a college graduate. Communist. Couldn't make a living. Too many ideas. Too much reading. I say, let the girls read, they love reading.

NICK Okay let's enjoy ourselves, okay? I want to talk to my kids too.

VITO Kids—they don't listen. Why should they listen? I never listened.

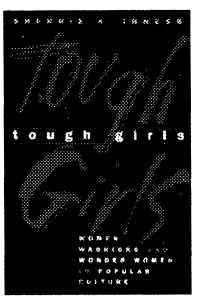
NICK Tony, this is good right here. Let's just plop right here.

VITO I'm usually a lot of fun, Nick—right? But to see a guy like that fall and break all his bones—holy shit, what a fall.

NICK All right, knock it off, will you? We're here, we're having a good time, we're gonna play with the kids—that's what you came here for. Otherwise, go home.

John Cassavetes, *A Woman Under the Influence,* screenplay (Faces Music, 1972), 89–90.

12. This notion of realism differs from conventional ones, although we can see it as a logical outgrowth of more traditional conceptions. In one of his definitions of realism, Raymond Williams writes: "Realist art or literature is seen as simply one convention among others, a set of formal representations, in a particular medium to which we have become accustomed" (*Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1976], 219–220). According to this definition, realism is merely a system of representational conventions so familiar that we no longer recognize them as conventions. Though it seems to reflect reality more authentically, realistic art—because it is, finally, merely a representation—in fact comes no closer to reality than other systems of representation. Richard Maltby agrees: "The goal of realism is an illusion. Art cannot 'show things as they really are,' because the 'real' in realism is defined as being that which is unmediated by representation. Since it is outside representation, it cannot be represented: representations can be only more or less inadequate imitations or substitutions for it" (*Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* [Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995], 150). Yet once we put as much pressure on the concept of realism as do Williams and Maltby, we are inevitably led to the conclusion that reality itself is not "real" but merely "realistic," since reality is also mediated through representations, performances, scripts and conventions, as well as through our own perceptions, misapprehensions and ideologies.
13. Ray Carney makes essentially this point when he says that the movie complicates "our awareness of both 'reality' and 'acting' so that the terms lose their separateness from each other. . . . There is no alternative pastoral self underneath all these masks, roles, and postures" (*American Dreaming: The Films of John Cassavetes and the American Experience* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985], 250). Carney also writes, "The characters who interest Cassavetes exist only by virtue of their performative capacities, their abilities to play with, and against, the audiences around them" (251). My argument about *Opening Night* adds to and diverges from Carney's in two principle ways. First, Carney does not recognize the special resonance between the experience of Cassavetes movies in general and the subject of *Opening Night* in particular. Second, though Carney acknowledges the ways in which people in Cassavetes movies behave like actors (everyday role-playing as the "art" in real life), he does not see the relation between that notion and the notion that improvisation causes actors to behave like regular people (improvisation as the "real" in art). Together these two elements (and the blurring of them) comprise the experience those of us who watch Cassavetes movies expect from them, and together they create the films' powerfully realistic effect.
14. The film's most heavy-handed instance of the paradoxical blending of realities occurs at the New York opening of *The Second Woman,* when some new actors appear in the movie as theater audience members. First, we see Peter Falk, the most famous of Cassavetes' troupe, standing in the theater lobby. The movie does not name him, but it seems as though Falk has come to see the play of his friend and colleague, John Cassavetes. That notion, however, violates the boundaries of the fictional reality. After the play, Tony Roberts and Seymour Cassel appear and the same paradox arises. Later still, Manny (played by Gazzara) introduces his wife Dorothy (played by Lampert) to director Peter Bogdanovich (played by Peter Bogdanovich), whom Manny introduces by name.
15. It would appear that Cassavetes maintained the same kind of ambiguity on the set that he generated for his audiences and his characters. Joan Blondell said about making *Opening Night,* "I couldn't tell when the actors were having a private conversation and when they were actually changing the lines of the script" (Janet Maslin, "From John Cassavetes, Tempest in the Theater," *New York Times,* 1 October, 1988, L15).



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for the original.

—Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*[1]

All of us have, at one time or another, left a movie theater wanting to kill the translator. Our motive: the movie's murder by "incompetent" subtitle. The death of a text through translation is an age-old trope, but it takes on new meaning with its transposition into cinema. The very possibility of that "death" implies a state of "animation," a state that is, after all, essential to the moving image. As in the case of literature, that death is a discursive condition, but with film it also constitutes a perceptual category. Spectators often find cinema's powerful sense of mimesis muddied by subtitles, even by skillful ones. The original, foreign, object—its sights and its sounds—is available to all, but it is easily obscured by the graphic text through which we necessarily approach it. Thus, the opacity or awkwardness of subtitles easily inspires rage.

I began thinking about the vagaries of the subtitle when I translated my first subtitles for Ogawa Shinsuke and Iizuka Toshio's *A Movie Capital* (*Eiga no miyako,* 1991). It was an experience filled with surprises. Here was an extraordinarily close form of textual analysis where every element of verbal and visual language is read off the image, repeatedly, line by line, even frame by frame. I was fascinated by the way this particular field of film analysis naturally raised theoretical problems in the course of working out practical solutions to seemingly simple problems. But nothing is simple when it comes to subtitles; every turn of phrase, every punctuation mark, every decision the translator makes holds implications for the viewing experience of foreign spectators. However, despite the rich complexity of the subtitler's task and its singular role in mediating the foreign in cinema, it has been virtually ignored. It is likely that no one has ever come away from a foreign film admiring the translation. If the subtitles attract comment, it is only a desire for reciprocal violence, a revenge for the text in the face of its corruption. For as we shall see, all subtitles are corrupt.

It is particularly curious that considering today's celebration of other cultures, this corruption has gone unconsidered, unchecked. I suspect the explanation lies in subtitling's ancillary, even hidden, position in the film's journey from production to exhibition. Fighting this corruption will require pushing the fact of translation out of the darkness. We must understand the limits of the subtitle in order to explore new methods. The violence of the subtitle is unavoidable, but there is no reason that it should necessarily lead to death . . . or that that violence should not be valuable, even enjoyable. In the 1990s we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of subtitling which is by nature positively *abusive*. With all the attention directed toward multiculturalism and diversity, now is the time to reconsider the mode of translation through which our cinematic experiences with the foreign are mediated. Looking closely at translations between English and Japanese, and moving between practical and theoretical poles, this paper will identify some of the dilemmas subtitlers face as well as their responses to these challenges over the past 70 years. Only then can we

move towards creative solutions through strategic abusiveness.

I have elaborated the notion of an abusive translation originally proposed by Philip E. Lewis in "The Measure of Translation Effects," an essay he originally wrote in French and translated into English himself.[2] Lewis analyses another critic's translation of Derrida's essay, *"La Mythologie blanche."* He begins by delineating the differences between French and English languages, arguing that "translation, when it occurs, has to move whatever meanings it captures from the original into a framework that tends to impose a different set of discursive relations and a different construction of reality."[3] The dissimilarity between languages creates differences that simply cannot be overcome, inevitably compromising the activity of translation. This is further compounded by the tendency for translation of essayistic texts to concentrate on meaning to the exclusion of texture and materiality. As both writer and translator of this essay, Lewis discovers a freedom to diverge from the original text unavailable to the typical translator. It is from this position that he proposes a new approach, "that of the strong, forceful translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own."[4] This is to locate the strength of a translation in its abuses. Where an original text strains language through textual knots dense with signification, the translation performs analogous violence against the target language. Corrupt subtitlers disavow the violence of the subtitle while abusive translators revel in it.

Put more concretely, the abusive subtitler uses textual and graphic abuse—that is, experimentation with language and its grammatical, morphological, and visual qualities—to bring the fact of translation from its position of obscurity, to critique the imperial politics that ground corrupt practices while ultimately leading the viewer to the foreign original being reproduced in the darkness of the theater. This original is not an origin threatened by contamination, but a locus of the individual and the international which can potentially turn the film into an *experience of translation.*

A Corrupt Practice

Facing the violent reduction demanded by the apparatus, subtitlers have developed a method of translation that conspires to hide its work—along with its ideological assumptions—from its own reader-spectators. In this sense we may think of them as *corrupt.* They accept a vision of translation that violently appropriates the source text, and in the process of converting speech into writing within the time and space limits of the subtitle they conform the original to the rules, regulations, idioms, and frame of reference of the target language and its culture. It is a practice of translation that smoothes over its textual violence and domesticates all otherness while it pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign. The peculiar challenges posed by subtitling and the violence they necessitate are a matter of course; they are variations of the difficulties in any translation, and in this sense are analogous to the problems confronted by the translator of poetry. It is the subtitler's response to those challenges which are corrupt. Subtitlers say they promote learning and facilitate enjoyable meetings with other cultures, bringing the sense behind actors' speech acts to the viewers through their skillful rendering at the edges of the screen. In fact, they conspire to hide their repeated acts of violence through codified rules and a tradition of suppression. It is this practice that is corrupt—feigning completeness in their own violent world. One of the few attempts at theorizing the subtitle touches on these issues, although is ultimately unsatisfying. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes,

> The duration of the subtitles, for example, is very ideological. I think that if, in most translated films, the subtitles usually stay on as long as they technically can—often much longer than the time needed even for a slow reader—it's because translation is conceived here as part of the operation of suture that defines the classical cinematic apparatus and the technological effort it deploys to naturalize a dominant, hierarchically unified worldview. The success of the mainstream film relies precisely on how well it can hide [its articulated artifices] in what it wishes to show. Therefore, the attempt is always to protect the unity of the subject; here to collapse, in subtitling, the activities of reading, hearing, and seeing into one single activity, as if they were all the same. What you read is what you hear, and what you hear is more often than not, what you see.[5]

We can accept Trinh's gloss to the extent that we recognize how, in this mode of translation, all forms of difference are suppressed and troublesome texts are fitted into the most conservative of frameworks. Take the example of sexual difference. In Japanese gender is clearly marked linguistically, and subtitles dramatize difference through stereotypes of the way men or

women *should* speak. In subtitles this is accomplished primarily through sentence-final particles. For example, the male ending *zo* has a hard, assertive sound, while female speech is softened by particles like *wa* and *no.* As with any corruption, habits are hard to break and behavior is ruled by convention. At the beginning of the Japanese subtitled version of *Robocop,* for example, the female and male cops meet each other just after the female officer beats a rowdy criminal into submission. After this display of no-nonsense brutality the new partners are introduced to each other, they get into a squad car, and drive away. The action is innocuous enough, but the dialogue involves an intense play for power that's entirely linguistic:

> Female Officer: I better drive until you know your way around.
>
> Male Officer: I usually drive when I'm breaking in a new partner.

In Japan this was subtitled in the following manner:

> Female: *Watashi ga unten suru wa.* / I will drive.
>
> Male: *Kimi ni wa makaseraren.* / I can't leave it to you.

Not only is this conversation reduced to its barest, literal meaning, but the power dynamic is changed from a struggle over knowledge to a simple domination. The woman's soft sentence-final particle *wa* contrasts with the male officer's curt verb ending; the difference strongly suggests he occupies a superior position. The woman's subtitle would have been much stronger with a different particle, such as *yo.* Without their accompanying image, the lines read like a gangster talking to his moll. The translator took great liberties, matching the substance of the target language with the image but evacuating the power play.[6]

We may be able to understand the basic, underlying logic of corruption by turning to its most extreme manifestation: dubbing. *The Velvet Light Trap* recently published what amounts to an apology for the practice of dubbing. Its author, Antje Ascheid, argues for dubbing as an exchange of one voice for another which produces a new text free of the constraints on the translator because there is no debt to an original. This allows the translator to bring the reader (read *consumer*) a readily digestible package that easily supplants any ideological baggage carried by the original film. While subtitles are described as purist and elitist, the author argues the dubbed soundtrack is liberating because mass audiences will not resist the foreign film because the dubber can resist the ideological underpinnings that link film to geopolitical struggles. Strange, then, that this is the essay's conclusion:

> Dubbing . . . mostly succeeds in effacing the fact of the film text's foreign origin; or, rather, it gives its new audience the chance to disavow what they really know, hence opening an avenue for cultural ventriloquism through voice postsynchronization. In doing so, the dubbed film appears as a radically new product rather than a transformed old one, a single text rather than a double one. Like a Japanese game computer, a Taiwanese shirt, or a German car, products that have been constructed to fit consumer desires in an international marketplace through the reduction of their cultural specificities, the to-be-dubbed film original initially fulfills an important criterion with which most other international commodities also comply: it foregrounds its function, ceasing to be a "foreign" film in order to become just a film. . . . In the international marketplace the film original thus functions as a transnational decultured product; it becomes the raw material that is to be reinscribed into the different cultural contexts of the consumer nations through the use of dubbing.[7]

Just a film indeed. Aside from an insufficient theorization of translation itself, this suspicious essay reduces the foreign tongue to nothing more than a "cultural disadvantage" where dubbing is perceived as "a strategy of empowerment." This is a fine example of a valorization of postmodern play being coopted by capital. The "exchange" facilitated by the "to-be-dubbed film" is simply of the capitalist variety: money for pleasure. This is the logic of corruption in its dubbed version, the one practiced by distributors for whom translation serves little more than surplus value. Today's subtitles participate in it to an unfortunate degree; any translator who wishes to think otherwise is blind.

These forms of corruption could be critiqued from the ideology of fidelity, which invokes the authority of the original and portrays it as an endangered purity or origin. This would reveal how subtitlers are reluctant to discuss the issue of fidelity, as it would expose their violence and make them appear incompetent. We could also extend the domain of this purity under siege to the terrain of the screen itself, like the Japanese cinematographer who decries ugly, superimposed subtitles for despoiling the image and separating spectators from the beauty of the original.[8] Indeed, any measure of

fidelity is a standard the apparatus itself will not permit. However, even though the term "corrupt" threatens to pose the original as territory unspoiled by subjectivity there are theoretical reasons that the abusive translator steers clear of such easy binaries to take a quite different tack. The first step is to simply expose the act of translation, release it from its space of suppression, and understand what subtitling actually is and how it came to its corrupt condition.

The Apparatus of Translation

The practice of subtitling has been even more obscured than the translation of written, printed texts. Indeed, most people probably have never thought of subtitling *as translation.* There is no question that English-language criticism about foreign cinema has taken the mediation of subtitles entirely for granted. Almost nothing has been written about them. Indeed, the translators themselves, along with their technicians, filmmakers, writers, censors, and the producers that hire them all, go to great lengths to suppress any acknowledgment of their conspiracy. It has been noted more than once that the unlucky translator is an author but not The Author, that her translation is a work but not The Work. But even this dynamic is absent from cinematic translation. This absence speaks doubly of the dominance of the image and the utter suppression of the subtitler's central role in enabling a film's border crossing.

To transport the subtitle from its space of obscurity and uncover the root of its corruption, we must consider what is specific to it as a particular mode of translation. This includes its material conditions and its historical contingency. In the cinema a massive apparatus necessitates a violent translation of the source text. The film's utterances are segmented by time; natural breaks in speech are marked for the temporal borders of the subtitle. The translator determines the length of each unit of translation down to the frame, that is, down to a 24th of a second. As the translation proceeds, the translator strives to match the timing of the subtitle with the sound and motion of the source text. A humorous line, for example, must be arranged to meet its audio-visual punctuation. Once accomplished, the translation moves through the hands of countless technicians, some of whom think nothing of "adjusting" a subtitle here or there for their own capricious, technical reasons. As we will see, this can lead to the kind of embarrassing mistakes that make translators cringe.

Finally, the translation is grafted onto the original text in one of three ways (in the case of film). The subtitles are photographed optically and sandwiched together with the sound and image as a third film strip, literally a third track. Or they are cut into the emulsion itself, incised, scratched onto the very tissue of the image. Or, more recently, they come to be burned into the tissue of the celluloid with a computer-driven laser.

Beyond the difficulties posed by this complicated process, the translator confronts an array of challenges that seem to lead down the path of corruption. The space and time available for translation is decided by the apparatus itself; this may be analogous to the challenge posed by poetry, but is actually a different problem. In film the machine runs at a constant speed and mindlessly unspools its translation at an unchanging rate. The translator must condense his translation in the physical space of the frame and the temporal length of the utterance. The reader cannot stop and dwell on an interesting line; as the reader scans the text, the machine instantly obliterates it. There are protocols for this condensation, but they differ depending on the translator and the apparatus. The number of spaces available for text depends on the format of the film (16mm, 35mm), the lens (1:33, 1:85, CinemaScope), and the subtitling method itself. The translator then determines how many letters or characters are legible in the second or two or three available to each title. It is often said that actors talk twice as fast as spectators can read, but this is hardly a useful starting point for the work of translation. Donald Richie, for example, allows for about one word per foot, or a two-line title per 12 feet.[9] Japanese subtitlers are fond of citing the rule, "Four characters per second."[10] Toda Natsuko explains how this rule was arrived at: the first subtitlers had to determine how fast the typical Japanese could read, so they showed a film to a Shinbashi geisha (!) and came up with three to four characters per second with a 13-character line.[11] Over the years they reduced the line to ten to prevent sloppy projectionists from cutting off the characters at the edges, but soon the four-characters-per-second rule was clad in iron. Actually, this history is far more nuanced than their representation of it. In any case, against this matrix of time and space, the translator submits the original text to a violent reduction that most readers consider inept—if they dodge the translator's feints and pause to think about it at all.

The Japanese language seems ready-made for subtitling: for one thing, Japanese does not waste precious space on gaps between words, and can even break a line in mid-word. *Kanji* (Chinese characters) express the maximum amount of meaning in a minimum of syl-

lables; neologisms and abbreviations are easily accomplished through the creative combination of *kanji.* Even better, Japanese often leave out the subject, direct object, or other parts of speech, saving much needed space. Because this forces speakers to be aware of context, the language itself prepares its readers to seek out what subtitles leave unsaid. Finally, in addition to italics, Japanese has the enviable ability to be inscribed both horizontally and vertically, a resource whose abusive potential is provocative. Finding the source language a richer linguistic world than one's own target language is probably a universal—and frustrating—experience for translators, but we must not let this impression lead toward an essentialist relationship to translation and its tools. A far more powerful ground for developing a translation attuned to its time is a thorough historicization, especially one that takes into account multiple national contexts. To avoid this is to flirt with the dangers demonstrated by the nationalist chauvinism of postwar Japanese subtitlers.

The subtitle has never been entirely ignored in Japan. Since at least the 1930s, *en-face* scenarios of foreign films have been published on a routine basis. However, the bulk of these contain complete translations of the films, and this speaks more for the Japanese film world's appreciation of the art of scenario writing than of subtitling per se. At the same time, there are currently schools devoted to training translators, and the name of the subtitler is always included as a credit in the Japanese prints of foreign films (at least in much of the postwar era). In fact, a number of these translators have achieved reputations among general audiences. Some subtitlers even have fans! The most famous—Shimizu Shunji, Okaeda Shinji, Kamishima Kimi, and Toda Natsuko—have published autobiographies, how-to books, and English conversation via subtitles textbooks.[12]

While many of history's most famous essays on translation have emerged in the course of practice, these authors' writings on "the art of subtitling" are deeply disappointing. Their conception of translation is regrettably simplistic. For example, the Russian cinematic adaptation and subsequent Japanese translation of *Hamlet* naturally raise the issue of the authority of the original text; oblivious to this kind of issue, Toda Natsuko—by far the most popular subtitler in Japan—uses the film only to suggest what a pity it would have been if dubbing had erased the main actor's beautiful, velvety voice.[13] Similarly, her mentor Shimizu Shunji describes his subtitles for Olivier's *Othello.* Noting that the great actor's performance was more theatrical than cinematic, he made much of his going to the unusual length of listening to a tape recording of the soundtrack while translating.[14] Now for most translators, Shakespeare's words provide their most daunting task, a test case for the most basic, pressing theoretical issues in translation. This does not occur to Shimizu or Toda. In both cases the actor and his voice replace Shakespeare as the sources to which the translator owes a debt.

These authors' understanding of film history is just as impoverished; they have done little or no research into the past or present conditions of their field, but they never hesitate to explain or "analyze" it. In his "Philosophy of Subtitling," Okaeda Shinji bases his aesthetics of cinema on a naive equation of silent and sound film narration. He unproblematically compares the narrative function of silent era intertitles to that of sound subtitles in the 1980s—with no consideration of the narrative presence of the *benshi*—to support his aesthetics of cinema: the less words a film has the better.[15] This is a typical example of how simplistic is the conception of cinema with which corrupt subtitlers operate.

Furthermore, their understanding of the relationship of subtitlers to the world film industry and its politics is particularly inadequate. Toda reduces "America's standard practice of dubbing" to the fact that it is a nation of immigrants, a comment that feels uncannily similar to statements a number of ministers have resigned over in recent years. Certainly an adequate explanation would have to deal with a complex overdetermination of forces: the emergence of English as a lingua franca of international business and politics; the world domination of Hollywood, its location within U.S. borders, and its near total domination of the home market; and an education system that places no value on foreign language study. Furthermore, while mass-market films may be dubbed, it is incorrect to say this is standard practice. The actual market for foreign films has historically demanded subtitles, and this has also become true of mainstream releases for foreign films as of the 1980s.

Toda's brand of radical reduction is complemented by tedious gloating over the Japanese language, the sensitivity of Japanese spectators, and the special skills required of the translator of films. Toda: "Japanese people's special tendency to want to see the original created a unique subtitle nation *(yuniiku na jimakukoku);* here, we are happy that every Japanese can read, an extremely special condition anywhere in the world."[16] Okaeda: "Japanese people's intention *(shikō)* towards the original is strong . . . (and one of the reasons) subtitles are the mainstream. . . . Considering this, subtitles are immortal. We could say, 'Japan: Nation of

the Subtitle Culture.'"[17] Subtitling is not in a repressed condition in Japan; rather, it is overvalued through the idealization of Japanese language and its own practice of translation of the foreign. In this case, both the usual repression and Japan's unusual fetishization achieve an identical effect in the end. They deflect or disavow the erasure of difference and the inequality of languages which the act of translation always threatens to expose.

A Submerged History

There is a pressing need to update our approach to film translation and perhaps even to undertake new translations of old film texts. To provide some context for this project—and to further push subtitling from its obscured position—we must uncover its history. Like the workings of the apparatus, this history has been ignored (or, in the case of Japanese authors, reduced to anecdote and gossip). This should not be surprising when we note that subtitles were invented shortly after the coming of sound—the moment when text was globally suppressed from the cinema.

Much has been made of Hollywood's innovative attempts to overcome the obstacles sound posed to business in non-English speaking countries. However, current histories concentrate exclusively on the early solutions: teaching stars new languages and making identical foreign-language versions with different actors on the same set. Surprisingly enough, the invention of subtitles—the greatest innovation and ultimate solution to the problem—is a gap in our history. There were interesting precursors to the subtitle as translators attempted a number of strategies to transport the unwieldy apparatus across the language barrier. In Japan and other parts of the world on the cusp of the sound era, a typical work-around involved silent-film-style intertitles explaining each section of the plot. Rudolf Arnheim, that obstinate critic of the talking film, discussed his frustration with these early attempts at translation in a 1929 essay entitled, "Sound Film Confusion":

> But we are already caught in the midst of a babel of tongues. Erich Pommer wants to mix languages when he makes his next UFA film. This will also force him to judge his actors not only by way of artistic measures, but also those of the Berlitz school. . . . Those with no linguistic geniuses among their actors must either sell talking films as silent abroad, in which case the dialogue scenes are shortened and replaced with laborious inter-titles (a process which is already beginning to raise general protest), or they must shoot the same film twice, as a talkie and as a silent. Both processes are only possible when the film is a piece of industrial waste for the masses and not art. For a work of art is not a shirt with removable sleeves.[18]

Arnheim hoped that such frustration would repel spectators from the talkie and turn them back to the silent film. However, translators were searching for new methods. Luckily, the people that subtitled the first films (and in so doing wrote the rules and conventions of subtitling) have committed their memories to print. Herman Weinberg was the first translator in the world to use subtitles; he is probably their inventor. In the course of his career, he titled over 400 films, including those in Sicilian, Japanese, Swedish, Hindustani, Spanish, Brazilian, Greek, Finnish, Yugoslavian, Czech, and Hungarian . . . obviously, a believer in knowing the target language better than the source language. (Surprisingly enough, this is not so unusual. In his 1989 profile, Okaeda Shinji claims over 1,000 titles to his credit, including *Citizen Kane, Star Wars,* and films in French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish.[19] Needless to say, one must wonder about quality in the face of such enthusiastic boasting over quantity.) Here Weinberg explains, in his own way, the experimentation that led to the codification of the practice:

> Someone with nothing better to do one day discovered the principle of the photo-electric cell which made it possible to transmit soundwaves into light waves and vice-versa, and which now made it possible for movies to talk. But when the films I was working with talked it was in French and German. What do we do now? Full screen titles was the first answer, stopping the action and giving the audience a brief synopsis of what they were going to see in the next ten minutes. Ten minutes later, another full-screen synopsis. This was not only silly but annoying as those in the audience who could understand the language could laugh at the jokes in between the full screen titles while those who couldn't (and they constituted the majority, by far) sat there glum, doubly irritated by the laughter of the linguists in the house. Obviously something had to be done to placate the customers before they started asking for their money back. Then someone discovered the existence of a mechanism called a "moviola." . . . It had a counter which enabled

you to measure every piece of dialogue because it, too, was now equipped with that magical photo-electric cell so that you could now measure not only the length of every scene but that of every line of dialogue. And from these measurements we were able, by the trial and error method . . . to determine what we were doing and why. Whew! And when I say "we" I mean *me,* as no one knew any more than anyone else did about it and I seemed to be the only one willing to go ahead with the actual writing and make something out of it. At the beginning, I was very cautious and superimposed hardly more than 25 or 30 titles to a ten-minute reel. . . . Then I'd go into the theatre during a showing to watch the audiences' faces, to see how they reacted to the titles. I'd wondered if they were going to drop their heads slightly to read the titles at the bottom of the screen and then raise them again after they read the titles (like watching a tennis match and moving your head from left to right and back again) but I needn't have worried on this score; they didn't drop their heads, they merely dropped their eyes, I noticed. This emboldened me to insert more titles, when warranted, of course, and bit by bit more and more of the original dialogue got translated until at the end of my work in this field I was putting in anywhere from 100 to 150 titles a reel . . . tho', I must repeat, only when the dialogue was good enough to warrant it.[20]

This new technology of translation is what enabled Hollywood to avoid any interruption in its dominance of the international film market. In Japan, new technology adding canned sound to image caused debates on many fronts, from the *benshi* who saw their livelihoods threatened to thoughtful critics theorizing a new practice for scenarios to leftist critics with industrial critiques. Most relevant to the discussion at hand, Marxist critic Iwasaki Akira argued the talkie was "anti-internationalistic" *(hikokusaiteki)* for the way sound emphasized the national character of films, particularly in the narrative drama. Although not his main point, this unexpected awareness of the source culture through the insertion of the source language/sound is precisely the quality that subtitlers came to suppress. There were alternatives in the very early period. Tokyo's Teigeki and Horakuza theaters experimented with titles projected to the side of the screen and a number of Hollywood films used Japanese Americans for dubbing soundtracks. More often than not, the *benshi* would call translations over the soundtrack, which was turned down to facilitate the narrator's competition with the new sound technology.[21] Theaters adopted differing conceptions of translation. The famous *benshi* Matsui Suisei represented one approach, which restricted the translation to bare-bones plot summaries throughout the film; however, in other Asakusa theaters, *benshi* attended to each individually spoken line. Once every week, Matsui's Shibazonokan Theater held "no explanation talkie days" *(tōkii musetsumei dē)* for those who disliked the *benshi*'s interference with the pleasurable sounds of the original.[22]

However, the method that became standard operating procedure was the superimposed (sub)title—in parentheses because they were not always at the bottom of the frame. Within a year or two of the talkie's public appearance, the major studios brought translators to New York to subtitle the latest films. This included Shimizu Shunji and Tamura Yukihiko, who conducted the first translation with film subtitles in Japanese. The film was von Sternberg's *Morocco,* and this is Tamura's description of the process:

> First of all, the first problem we encountered was whether to use vertical or horizontal lines. For this, I performed various experiments. In the case of vertical lines, three-and-a-half feet of film were required to read one line with 12 characters. However, we found that if we printed the same line horizontally it would be impossible to read without five or more feet. Besides the decision to print vertically, we had to decide to put the subtitle on the right or left side. It was impossible to settle on a position. We'd put them on the right to avoid covering something on the left and vice versa. So we watched previews and investigated the problem scene by scene. . . . About 30 cards per reel was the limit. We were careful to avoid showing the embarrassing sight of titles from one scene running over into the next.[23]

After reading these first-person accounts by the pioneers of film translation, it would appear that the conventions of subtitling have changed little since their invention. This is to say that the rules and regulations that govern the production of subtitles (exclusive of those related to the apparatus itself) were set during the age of the Hollywood studio system. One might think this explains why subtitles look and function the way they do. However, it must also be stressed that while the subtitling apparatus itself has changed little, the

practice of subtitlers has, and the changes themselves are closely tied to the ideological context at the moment of translation. Likewise, any theorization of subtitles must be considered against its historical moment, which points us to the weakness of Trinh's analysis of subtitling. Her understanding of a subtitling buttressing a unified subject position and the implicit call for an oppositional avant-garde is anchored too deeply in 1970s suture theory. While I share her concerns over the ideological dimension of subtitling, I steer away from such essentialized arguments and toward a theorization grounded in a strong historical contextualization.

Let us focus on the example of Japanese subtitling and its historical development. A closer consideration of Tamura's description suggests there are crucial differences between prewar and present subtitling conventions. Unfortunately, most of the foreign films distributed in Japan before World War II were destroyed in the Film Center fire in the 1970s.[24] Other prewar prints of foreign films are extremely rare, and should they exist they would be equally difficult to view. There is, however, a way around this problem.

When a film was imported into Japan, the Home Ministry required the submission of a *ken'etsu daihon* (censorship scenario).[25] *Ken'etsu daihon* typically included a complete translation of every utterance and a description *of* nearly every sound effect. They also included an *en-face* listing of the film's subtitles. Only 3 copies were made, the official copy that received the Home Ministry seal, one for studio use, and one for preservation at the Ministry (with the establishment of the Film Law of 1939, two more copies were created for the Home Ministry's Information Bureau and the Ministry of Education). In any case, it should not be surprising that only a handful of these precious scenarios are extant.

Shimizu Shunji recently acquired the *ken'etsu daihon* of *Morocco.* His analysis is predictably superficial, but provides a useful starting point for exploring the real history of Japanese subtitles. Shimizu counts 297 subtitles in Tamura's version. Tamura's original translation used only 234, but after seeing a test print he felt the extra 63 titles were necessary.[26] Throughout his books, Shimizu often notes that before the war subtitlers used somewhere between a half and a third of the subtitles used today. With *Morocco*'s *ken'etsu daihon* in hand, he attempts to find the difference. First, he parses the scenario according to today's standards and decides his own count would come to 492. Then he counts Kikuji Hiroshi's postwar subbing of the film, which uses 491. Finally, he compares Kikuji's and Tamura's actual translations, concluding that outside of a few old *kanji,* excessively long subtitles, and Tamura's choice not to translate Dietrich's songs, there is no significant difference.

I find this a rather startling conclusion. Putting the actual translation of words aside for the moment, the difference between 297 and 492 strongly suggests we are dealing with two very dissimilar conceptions of translation. Shimizu was pursuing the wrong questions. Rather than wondering about the phrasing of individual titles, he should have been asking, "If Tamura chose to subtitle only half of the utterances, then what exactly was he translating? *What was the object of translation?*"

I have found the *ken'etsu daihon* for King Vidor's *The Champ* (1931), which contains Shimizu Chiyota's subtitles.[27] Consistent with Shimizu Shunji's writing, roughly half of the film's utterances went untranslated. Only 328 of the film's 869 lines received titles.[28] Upon closer examination, the first thing one notices is that the translation pares down the film primarily to narrative movement. This means certain characters which the translator deemed insignificant are virtually (or even completely) written out of the film because their lines go unsubtitled. For example, not only are the lines of Jackie Coogan's half-sister mostly untranslated, Shimizu ignored all references to her. The film never firmly establishes their relationship, so for viewers of the subtitled version she is simply a cute little girl who shows up every once in a while, says something incomprehensible, and then disappears. Her excision from the film via subtitles marks the film with a patriarchal reading of the film placed between text and reader/spectator.

Another crucial criterion for selection appears to be thematic. *The Champ* is well known as an early response to the social effects of the Great Depression. The film's characterization revolves around a woman who divorced her poor husband (the boxer) for a rich man; the mother wants to remove their son from the Champ's custody to save the child from the "poor environment." However, Shimizu's translation tends to leave out verbal references to the class discourse of the film. Virtually the only subtitles that retain it point to visual markers of class which the audiences would not have missed, such as the difference between the Champ's flop-house apartment and the mother's luxurious hotel. Significantly, even class differences in speech itself—inflection, vocabulary, grammar, and the like—are largely unreflected in the style of the subtitles. We can find the real effects of Shimizu's selective translation in a special section devoted to Ozu's *Pass-*

ing Fancy (*Dekigokoro,* 1933) in *STS,* one of Japan's earliest film theory journals. At the time, this film was often compared to *The Champ* for its narrative centered on an intense father-son relationship, and apparently Ozu based the script on Vidor's film. In his *STS* article, Mura Chio attempts a structural comparison of the two films' scripts to investigate the differences between sound and silent film scenario writing. One of his conclusions: "In terms of story telling, Marion's firm, text-heavy scenario style and Vidor's direct, solid directorial method precisely show us the instinctual love of father and child, however, they do not in any way describe the world that lower-middle-class people inhabit."[29] This suggests that the translator regards speech primarily as a vehicle for narrative propulsion, not expression as such, and that many of the choices regarding what to retain as relevant have quite serious ideological implications. However, the most important criterion is also the least obvious.

The Champ has (at least) three moments of melodramatic excess which are fascinating for their translation. By excess I mean elements such as mise-en-scène, sound, acting, and writing which are heightened to complement emotional distress. These scenes are the horse race where Jackie Coogan's horse stumbles just as it is about to win, the jail scene where Wallace Beery rejects Jackie and tells him to go to his mother, and the prize fight at the end. Shimizu's translation sets up each scene . . . and then simply stops. For example, the narrative tension of the horse race comes primarily from the announcer's call. Without his description of Coogan's come-from-behind bid for first place, it is impossible to tell which horse is in which position. There are no subtitles providing this information. The heartbreaking jail scene—by far the most memorable moment of the film—begins with a quiet dialogue between the Champ and his trainer Sponge. Of their nine lines, all but two are translated (and these were easy to guess by context). When Dink arrives, the melodrama gradually intensifies while the subtitle count drops steeply. From here until the moment Dink leaves the jail crushed by his father's explosive rejection, only nine of 24 lines are translated! Near the end, when the two scream at each other and the Champ violently strikes his son through the prison bars, the subtitles stop. This breaks the most cherished rules of today's corrupt subtitlers who "naturally" assign meaning to every utterance as a matter of course.

This returns us to our original question: "If not the meaning of every line, what exactly was the object of translation?" On the one hand, Shimizu was ignoring the parts of speech that contribute to expression and simply translating the narrative meaning behind the words. On the other hand, for moments when the speech act itself was contributing to the overall expression of the film's emotional impact, *he chose not to translate.* Implicit in his decision was the assumption that the grain of the voice was more important than the meaning it articulated. The difference between these two strategies comes down to the two basic patterns first outlined by Cicero 2,000 years ago: sense-for-sense versus word-for-word translations. The sense-for-sense subtitles zero in on the narrative movement of the scenario, root out each line's basic meaning and translate this into Japanese. The word-for-word translation stresses the importance of the materiality of language as opposed to some essential meaning found behind the letter. In *The Champ,* Shimizu generally uses a sense-for-sense translation to the extent that he strips the lines of dialogue to their barest, most literal, function of moving the plot (granted, as he interprets it). *Simultaneously, we find a word-for-word translation in the decision to refuse to translate.*

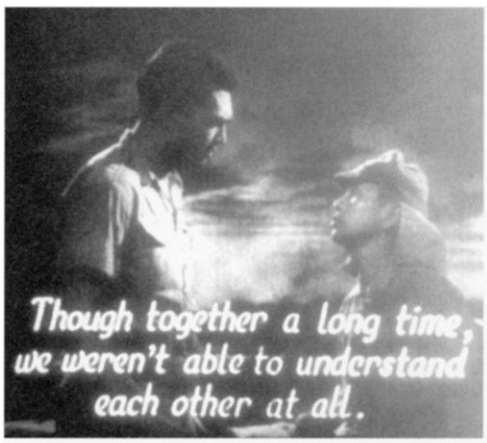
The Champ's example is not an isolated fluke. In fact, other reports concerning prewar subtitling practices suggest a variety of graphic tactics that also exhibit a word-for-word translation style. For example, in *M* there is a scene in which a boy hawks newspapers; as the camera nears the boy, his voice gets louder on the soundtrack. At the same time, the Japanese subtitles translating the boy's voice grow correspondingly larger and larger, providing a graphic representation of the materiality of the speech.[30] Furthermore, Japanese subtitlers routinely placed their titles in different areas of the scene depending on the cinematographer's composition. It was thought that the position of the words should complement mise-en-scène and movement. At the same time, there are indications that subtitle positioning depended upon narrative as well. One story from critic Yodogawa Nagaharu describes a dreamy Hollywood love scene where the subtitles appeared *between* the two lovers.[31] Of course!

The conception of translation in the talkie period circulated between two poles, between a sense-for-sense hermeneutic search for, and transmission of, meaning, and a word-for-word translation of language's material qualities. The reason for this indeterminacy lies in the historical moment. We can detect as much from an article about the subtitling of *Morocco* which Tamura published ten days before the film's public release: "This time, there was the fear that with too few subtitles, the meaning would not come through. At least, I thought that it was necessary to use the same number of titles as silent movies. Spanish and Portuguese

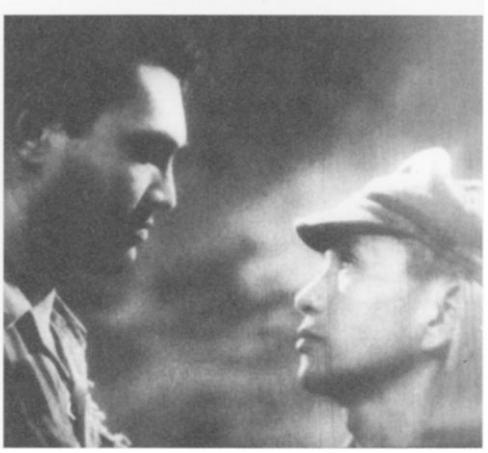
subtitles used far too many subtitles, more than 400 subtitles for one film. However, because Japanese audiences are sensitive to the feelings of films, I believed it was unnecessary to attach more than 30 subtitles per reel."[32] This is an approach to translation that relies on a conception of cinema grounded in the silent era. In *The Champ*'s jail scene, the subtitles initially correspond to the narrative mode of the talkie as it set up the premise for the confrontation between father and son; then it shifted back to silent cinema for the melodramatic finish.

While this seems to be a likely explanation, we must return to the silent era to adequately understand the specificities of this national cinema context and its historical moment. One might say that the *benshi* was the first form of dubbing in the pre-history of the talkie. These screen-side narrators would describe the action on the screen and supply voices for all the actors, eliminating the need for the translation of silent film intertitles. Aaron Gerow's research into the critical discourses surrounding the figure of the *benshi* reveal that reformers of the Pure Film Movement sought to modernize Japanese cinema by renovating the role of the *benshi* and revising the standard use of intertitles.[33] The *benshi,* they felt, should avoid flowery elocution for everyday speech, and stick closely to the filmmaker's plotting instead of their independent elaborations of the narrative. In other words, they hoped the *benshi* would become invisible, much like the corrupt subtitles of later decades. In the end, the *benshi* proved more powerful and popular, setting the stage for the unusual subtitles of the talkie era in Japan. We can attribute the two styles of pre-subtitle *benshi* translation—paraphrase vs. line-by-line—to these very discursive tensions designed by the Pure Film Movement. Secondly, the same reformers called for the elimination of intertitles, since film was essentially a *visual* medium. This could also help explain why so few subtitles were used in the 1930s compared to today. These are probably precedents contributing to an overdetermination of forces bearing down on Japan's first subtitles.

By the end of the decade the shift to the postwar sense-for-sense conventions becomes detectable. In a 1939 article entitled "The Impoverished Japanese of



Dawn of Freedom: In this dreamy sayonara scene from *Dawn of Freedom* (*Ano hata o ute,* 1942), a Japanese soldier says goodbye to his Filipino friend before departing for the battle of Corregidor. By WWII, Japanese subtitles took their place at the edges of the screen, striving to match the sympathies of the audience. The subtitle for the Filipino soldier's line: "Tadashi, I have no idea what you are saying. That's a pity."



Spoken Titles," Ota Tatsuo criticizes contemporary subtitles and calls on translators to study towards a new Japanese language for film translation. He uses tropes for sense-to-sense translations which have circulated throughout the history of translation theory:

> Understanding [a film] means not intellectually, but perfectly matching the feelings, as if one with the same atmosphere, and soaking through to the inside of the hearts of the Japanese masses. Thus we must stop the spoken titles that are messengers brought from a foreign language; spoken titles should be messengers from a meeting with Japanese language. In other words, they are not translations of foreign language, but they must create in Japanese the things that are trying to be expressed in the foreign language.[34]

To this end, Ota calls for the end of direct translation of foreign words and the creation of a new Japanese language specifically for film translation (although a novel idea, he was beaten to the notion of a specialized language for translation by Schleiermacher). Subtitlers must stop relying on the advice of experts hired from university literature departments and write subtitles that speak directly to the soul of the masses. To this end, subtitlers must recognize the limits of *kanji* and restrict their usage of characters to a level attuned to the masses, which he determines is somewhere at or below the elementary school graduate's level. Subtitlers must strive to be like the *benshi,* which is to say become one with the fabric of the film so they may speak directly to their audience in the deepest sense (again a conception of the *benshi* consistent with the reformers of the Pure Film Movement). Above all, their subtitles should not be direct translations of foreign words, but strive for a perfect match with the Japanese soul.

This last assertion is crucial because it expresses the shift, and its historical moment, most clearly. Ota is calling for a subtitling practice that completely dominates the foreign. As with the Romans' relationship to Greek texts and Early Christians' relationship to Latin texts, he hopes to enrich his own language in the process

Left: *Privilege:* "'He hit my breast.' A straight woman would be embarrassed."—Some anonymous, corrupt technician changed the translation of "straight" to *seijō na hito,* or "normal person."

Below: *Peking:* "While photographing your countenance, they will record your voice with this ball."/"Today, thanks to Councillor Tanaka's introduction, the cameramen from our allied nation . . ." —*Peking* was a 1939 Japanese film by Kamei Fumio shot in the city after the Japanese began their occupation. This is an example of how early Japanese subtitles accounted for the composition of the photography. When the man on the left speaks his subtitles appear on the far side of the frame, and vice versa.

of appropriation. St. Jerome stated the premise of this kind of translation most directly: "The translator considers thought content a prisoner . . . which he transplants into his own language with the prerogative of a conqueror."[35] The issue of translation cuts straight through to the relationship of self and other. Ota's essay, written at a time when Japan was penetrating deep into China and contemplating a colonization of Asia, reveals a totalitarian wish for a subtitle that erases difference and incorporates foreign meaning into a perfected, harmonized mass readership. It is a theory of translation tailored to Japan's geopolitical aspirations. Ota's vision of a sense-for-sense translation would evolve into the codes of corruption in the postwar period, a style of translation that effaces its violent, mediating presence by hiding in the margins of the frame and discreetly translating every utterance on the soundtrack.

While Ota calls for a new writing and a new language he still defends most of the prewar conventions, such as the number and placement of titles. However, an example from the other side of the globe may teach us that conventions themselves can be changed most easily at particular moments in history when the rules governing practices are in flux. Jean Eustache's *The Mother and the Whore* (*La Maman et la putain,* 1973) is a central post-68 film made in the wake of the French New Wave. This film movement was centered on breaking cinematic conventions and indulging in those things only cinema is capable of—it was essentially abusive filmmaking. This liberated Eustache's translator to deal with the problem of the subtitle's violence with the kind of experimentation that works only at that kind of moment in film history. Throughout this clever film, the transparency of the subtitles would be interrupted with the bracketed note:

[Untranslatable French Pun]

This provides a cogent example of the flexibility of subtitling that is engaged in the cinematic practice of its time. The very conception of this subtitle was possible only because the French New Wave filmmakers were systematically attacking every convention of cinema. The freedom to experiment with textual knots of impossibility made the untranslatable French pun translatable. We must not reject impossibility, but embrace it. Moments of untranslatability—a nearly constant condition for the subtitler—are times for *celebration,* for not only are they privileged encounters with the foreign, but they are also opportunities for translators to ply the highest skills of their craft. They are moments crying for abuse.

The Abusive Turn

There is a potential and emerging subtitling practice that accounts for the unavoidable limits in time and space of the subtitle, a practice that does not feign completeness, that does not hide its presence through restrictive rules. We must reconsider our own historical moment and work toward a subtitling that engages today's sensibilities with a violence which is not corrupt, but abusive.

To sketch out the character of abusive subtitling and establish some sense for how it fits into the context of its own history, I propose we divide sound film history into three epochs of translation, the last of which is only just emerging. The history of translation discourse is full of tripartite formulas to describe different modes of translation, from Dryden to Novalis and Goethe to Jacobsen. The epochs I suggest may be seen as historical phases through which cinema has passed, but they also surpass this synchronic structure and appear simultaneously. The potential for this simultaneity will be particularly important for our understanding of abusive subtitling. Roughly sketched, the three epochs of translation may be described in the following manner.

The first kind of translation occurs in the talkie era. It uses a straightforward prose to introduce the pleasures of foreign texts. The language of the subtitles themselves exhibits a functionality clearly designed to communicate the power of the foreign original as efficiently as possible. In this respect the first era of subtitles brings the foreign text to the spectators on their own domestic terms. At the same time, the translator remains fully cognizant of the material dimensions of language—both its graphic and aural qualities. This is to say it is an approach to translation straddling the theoretical paradigms of sense for sense vs. word for word. It may be that this is a conception of cinematic translation anchored firmly to that transition into amplified aurality. However, while there can be no question of its historical specificity in this instance, we still must resist restricting a given mode of translation *as a possibility* in any period of cinema.

In the second epoch of cinematic translation, the translator pretends to move toward the foreign, dwell there, and bring its wonders to the waiting crowds. This era is replete with rules designed to guarantee a translation's quality, but what this regulation actually accomplishes is an appropriation of the source text and its thorough domestication. The rules also enforce a territorialization and professionalization of translation,

producing stars and experts and excluding all alternatives. This mode of translation, which I have contemptuously called corrupt, conforms the foreign to the framework of the target language and its cultural codes. All that cannot be explained within the severe limits of the regulation subtitle gets excised or reduced to domestic meanings which are often irrelevant or inappropriate. These subtitlers claim to bring their readers/spectators to a pleasurable experience of the foreign, but in fact they please only themselves through these impoverished translations. As for their audiences, they are kept ignorant of the conspiracy and the riches that remain hidden from the cinematic experience.

The final part of this triptych brings us to the abusive. For this epoch of translation, I wish to borrow another phrase from Goethe, both for the power of its image and to specify what abusive subtitling is not. In the third stage of Goethe's own periodization of translation, "the goal of the translation is to achieve perfect identity with the original, so that the one does not exist instead of the other but in the other's place."[36] Here the translator identifies strongly with the source text and the culture in which it was produced, so much so that he cedes the particular powers of his own culture to accomplish a translation that invites the reader/spectator to a novel and rich experience of the foreign. Of course, Goethe's conception of translation is deeply tied to Romantic notions that seek to define the self through its various others—another form of domestication. However, abusive subtitling avoids this kind of erasure of difference, seeking to intensify the interaction between the reader and the foreign. And while the notion of abusive translation originates from a Derridian perspective, the third epoch of subtitling I am identifying also rejects poststructuralism's endless play of signification. Rather, this translation does not present a foreign divested of its otherness, but strives to translate from and within the place of the other by an inventive approach to language use and the steady refusal of rules.

As we have seen, the key differences between the translation of printed texts and the subtitling of moving image media are that the cinema adds the human voice to the equation and is propped up by an apparatus that *requires* a violent translation which in turn exhibits many of the traits Philip Lewis calls abusive. Even the subtitles for the most nondescript, realist film tamper with language usage and freely ignore or change much of the source text; however, corrupt subtitlers suppress the fact of this violence necessitated by the apparatus, while the abusive translator enjoys foregrounding it, heightening its impact and testing its limits and possibilities. To the extent that Lewis' abusive translation partakes in a kind of guilt-free licentiousness, his model is attractive to the subtitler of the emergent third epoch. This theorization will prove particularly attractive in an age where the experience of the foreign is valued, and where abuse helps inject a palpable sense of the foreign—precisely where we must depart from Lewis's theoretical assumptions.

In the Derridian approach to translation which Lewis espouses, abuse is directed at both language and its metaphysical assumptions. While this is a component of the abusive subtitle, the objects and ends of abuse are more than this. Trinh Minh-ha's meditations on subtitling—one of the few examples from the history of film theory—share Lewis's theoretical concerns, as we saw in her previous comment on subtitles and suture. It is an approach heavily dependent upon 1970s film theory and its rather elitist conception of the role of experimentation in combating the evils of Hollywood realism with a deconstructive or Brechtian avant-garde.[37] The problems with such a position have since been argued on many fronts: its Eurocentrism, its elitism, and its inability to account for popular reading modes. Still, we may consider the critiques of poststructuralism the segue between the second and third epochs of subtitling. Thus, the abusive turn I am identifying is also a turn from Lewis and Trinh.

A better measure of its location is Cicero's sense-for-sense vs. word-for-word translations. For all the elaborate theorizations of translation, few writers stray far from this early conceptualization. The corrupt subtitles of the middle epoch are solidly sense for sense, for the translator looks behind the word and ferrets out an essential meaning that she transports to the "equivalent" meaning in the target language. Abusive subtitles encroach on the word-for-word end of the spectrum because they take into consideration the array of qualities that make up the material basis of language, many of which call the specter of untranslatability to the fore. On this count, Trinh comes closer in spirit to the third epoch in the following quote from a different essay: "Language as voice and music—grain, tone, inflections, pauses, silences, repetitions—goes underground. Instead, people from remote parts of the world are made accessible through dubbing/subtitling, transformed into English-speaking elements and brought into conformity with a definite mentality."[38] Abusive translations are also sense-for-sense translations to varying degrees, as a truly word-for-word translation—a literal substitution of one word directly for another—would result in meaningless gibberish. However, one of the most important values of the third epoch is a respect for other cultures and a willingness to confront their otherness

without domination or erasure. Abusive subtitles embody this spirit, and thus circulate between Cicero's poles without settling in either extreme.

Let us look at a number of concrete examples that suggest that corrupt subtitling practices are obsolete and the time for abuse is ripe. Donald Richie, who has subtitled some of the most famous Japanese films, is the translator of Kurosawa's *Ran,* one of the most abusive translations ever undertaken (with the possible exception of the Marxist appropriations of kung-fu films in post-1968 France or the dubbing of Woody Allen's *What's Up, Tiger Lily?*).[39] With the coming of talkies, Japanese *samurai* films found it necessary to codify a version of what pre-Meiji Japanese language should sound like. They ended up with a *samurai* version of King James English, which has remained a central feature of the genre up to the present. This poses an interesting dilemma for the subtitler, who is well aware of the generic importance of this specialized language—one can hardly imagine a period film without it (indeed, to replace it with "standard Japanese" would probably be perceived as daringly experimental). However, there is no way to bring this important element of the genre to a foreign spectator without breaking the laws of corruption, which is exactly what Richie attempted. He writes, "Carried away by all the pageantry I relaxed my guard and thought to intrude a bit of period color of my own. . . . I left out the occasional prepositions in a way common to formal court English. Something like 'I want you to go,' I foolishly rendered as 'I would with you go.' Not incorrect but, in dialogue titles, completely inappropriate."[40] Obviously regretting his experiment, Richie finally exemplifies the sensibility of corruption when he calls for a "scrupulously anonymous kind of English." He continues, "I feel that the translation should be invisible. . . . Any oddity, any term too heightened, as well as any mistake, calls attention to this written dialogue. I won't even use exclamation points. The language should enter the ear as the image enters the eye."[41] I couldn't disagree more. Actually, these subtitles were quite wonderful for the way they approximated the generically tortured Japanese of the film itself, but subsequent video versions have substituted Richie's subtitles with an obscenely anonymous translation. Richie self-censors his smart impulse to abuse the text.

Otaku no Video (*Otaku no bideo,* 1991) is a pseudo-documentary about fan cultures in Japan. Produced by a large *anime* production and distribution company, half the documentary is animated. Its subtitles use the abusiveness of the amateur translators they market to.

Rob Young confronted similar issues with Yamamoto Masashi's *Tenamonya Connection* (*Tenamonya konekushon,* 1991), which celebrates Osaka's culture and dialect. This film is subtitled "Fools Cross Borders" *(Aho wa kyōkai o koeru)* and in the course of its 90-odd minutes it criss-crosses between Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Osaka, blurring the boundaries between Hong Kong/Tokyo, fiction/documentary, Hong Kong comedy/Japanese comedy, male/female, and even inside movie/outside theater. Young takes this rowdy playfulness as license to experiment ever so slightly. He manipulates his English in a manner analogous to Richie, filling his text with excessive contractions, slang, and "bad" English where the scenario deploys an analogous fast-and-loose approach to speech, or where it celebrates linguistic markers of class and regional difference. Another tactic he uses comes far closer to the spirit of abusiveness. Obscene expressions like *konchikusho!* and *konoyarō!* are translated !%&$#!@!! We can learn several things from Young's example. First, this is not the kind of censorship we expect of corrupt subtitles, which often leave "foul" language untranslated. Rather, it is the translator's attempt to experiment with language in ways that are analogous to the linguistic playfulness of the original scenario and its verbalization. Secondly, faced with the seemingly untranslatable, the abusive subtitler may seek to produce polyvalencies and knots of signification that may not coincide precisely with the problem in the source text. There may not be a one-to-one correspondence between all of Young's subtitles using "improper" grammar and similar utterances on the soundtrack, nevertheless his approach cues the spectator to the elaborate playfulness of the dialogue that would have been completely erased by corrupt titles. Third, despite his instinctual abusiveness, Young, like Richie before him, also restricts himself to the time/space/graphic limits of the standard subtitle. Attuned to his historical mo-

ment in the third epoch, Young hints at the possibilities; but a truly abusive subtitling would have been as wild as the original film. *It would have truly brought the spectator to the film.* This would appear radical from the perspective of the second era, but surely you, who live in the emerging third era, can feel the problems with convention.

There are more daring and thrilling examples of the emerging abusive subtitle elsewhere, places where capital does not enforce the rules and regulations of corruption. In the spring of 1993, Professor Laurel Rodd of the University of Colorado assigned her Japanese translation class the task of translating subtitles for the opening of Itami Jūzo's *A Taxing Woman Returns* (*Marusa no onna 2,* 1987). This short sequence includes strings of *kango* (Chinese words) and snatches of classical Japanese. The class quickly learned to appreciate the difficulties facing the translator of films, but their intuitive solutions to confronting the practical issues had little to do with the corrupt rules of the second epoch's subtitlers. They regretted their "inability" to experiment and put subtitles in different colors and in different parts of the frame. In fact, their exercise was hypothetical and nothing was preventing them from indulging in the most outrageous innovation (the new technologies of video which link the apparatus with computers can easily manipulate the material aspects of the subtitle through colors, fonts, sizes, and animation). The tools are in place, but the professionals, like the students above, check themselves, held back as they are by the inertia of convention and the ideology of corruption.

Actually, this has not restrained one group of translators from whom we may learn much. In fact, this article was inspired by their work. In the past few years, a massive fandom has developed around Japanese animation *(anime)* throughout the world. A substantial portion of the fan activity concentrates on translation. Scripts are posted on internet newsgroups and circulated among clubs and individuals. Fan hackers write software for the Amiga and other computer platforms, software that enables them to take the subtitling apparatus into their own hands. Groups collaborate on not-for-profit subtitled versions of their favorite *anime.* Working outside of the mainstream translation industry, lacking any formal training, these fans have

Four frames from a fan-subbed video tape of *Ranma 1/2: This Is Greenwood (Ranma 1/2: Koko wa Guriin uddo).*

produced abusive subtitles *quite by instinct.* In scenes with overlapping dialogue, they use different colored subtitles. Confronted with untranslatable words, they introduce the foreign word into the English language with a definition that sometimes fills the screen. Footnotes! Some tapes include small-type definitions and cultural explanations which are illegible on the fly (here we find a completely new viewing protocol made possible by video where the viewer halts the apparatus's mindless march and reads subtitles at leisure). They use different fonts, sizes, and colors to correspond to material aspects of language, from voice to dialect to written text within the frame. And they freely insert their "subtitles" all over the screen. It is as if history folds back on itself and we find a resurgence of the subtitling practice of the talkie era, but the underlying differences put the two worlds apart.

The example of *anime* fandom reveals the distance between the often elitist valorizations of anti-Hollywood experimentation and the abusive subtitle. Both may be canny on ideological problems, both may innovatively break convention, but the latter attempts to engage readers' sensibilities with the same sensibilities with which the readers engage their texts. Just as the spectator approaches films from far-away places to enjoy an experience of the foreign, the abusive translator attempts to locate his or her subtitles in the place of the other. Rather than smothering the film under the regulations of the corrupt subtitle, rather than smoothing the rough edges of foreignness, rather than converting everything into easily consumable meaning, the abusive subtitles always direct spectators back to the original text. Abusive subtitles circulate between the foreign and the familiar, the known and the unknown, just as they shift between sense-for-sense and word-for-word modalities. Were we speaking of the translation of printed texts, the third epoch would most likely be filled with interlinear books. And is this not a characteristic of the foreign film's structure? The subtitled moving image is a constellated figure; both the original and the translation are simultaneously available, as if they were *en face.* Most important, viewers work off the original text whether they understand its language or not. Although corrupt subtitles work strongly against this reading practice, abusive subtitles encourage it.

The time is ripe for abuse, if only because we are in an age where moving image literacy includes the ability to manage complex text/image relations. Audiences bring those talents to the foreign film, but they go entirely unused. Indeed, what once was radical experimentation is now the stuff of Hollywood cinema, MTV and pop-up video, commercials, sitcoms, and the nightly news. Complex image/text relationships are a normalized textuality from everyday experience (exceedingly so in Japan). From this perspective, corrupt subtitling is actually archaic. Thus, "abuse" is directed at convention, even at spectators and their expectations. And when abusive subtitling becomes normalized, we will think of other terms . . . or simply drop the adjective. It is likely that abusive translations will begin with animation, comedies, the art film, and the documentary—texts that are themselves transgressive or essayistic—but there is nothing holding us back from subjecting the most non-violent films to abuse. The only other choice is corruption.

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Notes

1. Quoted in Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic German,* trans. S. Heyvaert (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1992), p. 53. Thanks to Darrell Davis, David Desser, and particularly to Makino Mamoru and Aaron Gerow for their help and comments while writing this essay.
2. Philip E. Lewis, "The Measure of Translation Effects," in *Difference in Translation,* ed. Joseph F. Graham, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 31–62.
3. Ibid., p. 36.
4. Ibid., p. 41.
5. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Framer Framed* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 102.
6. An analogous reversal of power may be found in the translation of *The X-Files* for Japanese television, in this case through the apparatus of dubbing. Mulder is dubbed by a man with a husky, deep, tough-man voice, while Scully's relatively low, business-like tone is replaced with the high-pitched voice one usually associates with soap operas and weather report announcers. This manipulation of the material qualities of language—in this case the grain of the voice—reverses the sexual play and politics of the show. While less dramatic, the *Robocop* example displays the same dynamic. As I will argue below, standard subtitles ignore the material aspects of language.
7. Antje Ascheid, "Speaking Tongues: Voice Dubbing in the Cinema as Cultural Ventriloquism," *The Velvet Light Trap,* no. 40 (Fall 1997), p. 40.
8. Fujinami Fujiaki, *Nyūsu Kameraman—Gekidō no Shōwashi o Toru* ("News Cameraman—Shooting the Turbulent History of the Showa Era"), (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1977), pp. 81–84.

9. Donald Richie, "Donald Richie on Subtitling Japanese Films," *Mangajin,* vol. 10 (1991), p. 16.
10. See for example, Toda Natsuko, *Jimaku no Naka ni Jinsei* ("A Life in Subtitles"), (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1994), p. 27; Okaeda Shiji, *Sūpā Jimaku Nyūmon—Eiga Honyaku no Gijutsu to Chishiki* ("Introduction to Subtitles—Film Translation Technology and Knowledge"), (Tokyo: Baburu Puresu, 1988), p. 18; Kamijima Kimi, *Jimaku Shikakenin Ichidaiki* ("Biography of a Subtitler"), (Tokyo: Pandora, 1995), p. 22.
11. Toda, p. 27. Toda is reporting hearsay; it appears she has done no real research for her history.
12. Biographies include Toda (1994), Kamijima (1995), and Shimizu Shunji, *Eiga Jimaku no Gojūnen* ("Fifty Years of Film Subtitling"), (Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobō, 1985). The latter is the most famous, but Kamijima's is the most interesting of the bunch. How-to books are popular among translators looking to add variety to their usual slate of boring business translations; a few of them are apparently used as textbooks in classes offered by some of the more high-profile subtitlers; see Kamijima (1995), Okaeda (1988), Okaeda (1989), *Shimizu Shunji, Eiga Jimaku no Tsukurikata Oshiemasu* ("Teaching the Way to Make Movie Subtitles"), (Tokyo: Bunshun Bunko, 1988), and Shimizu Shunji, *Eiga Jimaku wa Honyaku de wa Nai* ("Film Subtitling Is Not Translation"), ed. Toda Natsuko and Ueno Tamako (Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobō, 1992).
13. Toda, p. 10.
14. Shimizu (1992), pp. 61–62.
15. Okaeda Shinji, *Jimaku Honyaku Kōgi no Jikkyō Chūkei* ("On-the-Spot Transmission of Subtitle Translation Lectures"), (Tokyo: Gogakushunjusha, 1989), pp. 194–195. Far more disturbing is his ignorant homophobia when he prefaces a section on homosexuality and subtitling with a bizarre aside implying America has "homos" and Japan does not, and explicitly blaming AIDS on American homosexuals.
16. Toda, p. 11.
17. Okaeda, p. 6.
18. Rudolf Arnheim, "Sound Film Confusion," in *Film Essays and Criticism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), pp. 33–34.
19. Okaeda (1989), p. 229.
20. Herman Weinberg, *Booze, Cigars, and Movies* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1985), pp. 107–108.
21. This strategy continued well into the postwar period in many parts of Asia that used narrators throughout the silent period.
22. Tachibana Takashirō, *Tōkiitsū* ("Authoritative Knowledge of the Talkie"), (Tokyo: Shiroku Shoin, 1930), pp. 118–119.
23. Tanaka Jun'ichirō, *Nihon Eiga Hattatsu-shi II* ("The History of the Development of Japanese Cinema II"), (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1980), p. 207.
24. According to Shimizu Shunji, Films Inc. in Tokyo holds a 35mm print of Tamura's *Morocco.*
25. The subtitler's collaboration with structures of censorship is an important form of corruption I do not have time to explore in this context. In Japan, subtitles were strictly censored in both prewar and postwar eras. More recently, censorship has largely been directed at the image exclusive of the soundtrack. Shimizu served for many years on the board of Eirin, one of the primary censorship authorities in Japan. Okaeda has a curious passage in his "lectures" about subtitling pornography. For example, he warns his students not to translate "Oh, that feels so good" directly over the utterance/sex act because the translation would never pass censorship proceedings; however, if the subtitle appears before or after, as in "I'll make you feel good," there should be no problem. How this practice affects the translation of mainstream texts is left unexplained. Okaeda (1989), pp. 201–202.
26. Shimizu, (1988), p. 350. While Shimizu's account says this version never reached public theaters, a contemporary article suggests otherwise. In "A Quick Note on the Talkie," Hayashi Chitose went to the trouble of counting lines of dialogue and subtitles. Hayashi's count: 387 spoken lines/229 subtitles with 4 "inserted subtitles," for an average of 32 lines/19 subtitles per reel. While he notes that the most dialogue-heavy scene of the film uses more subtitles (41 for 52 lines), Hayashi stops his analysis with the basic argument that "less is better." I argue below this is nothing other than a silent era-specific conception of cinema carried over the sound barrier. Hayashi Chitose, "Tokii ni Kan Suru Hashirigaki" ("A Quick Note on the Talkie"), *STS* no. 5 (10 May 1931), p. 39.
27. These and other *ken'etsu daihon* are preserved in the Makino Mamoru Collection. Shimizu Chiyota was, along with Tamura, one of the founding members of *Kinema Junpō,* the premiere film magazine from the teens to the present-day.
28. Longer lines required multiple subtitles, making the total number of subtitles 360. The other *ken'etsu daihon* I inspected appeared to have similar subtitle counts. They may be found in the Makino Mamoru Collection.
29. Mura Chio, "Ozu Yasujiro no Geijutsu Taido" ("Ozu Yasujiro's Artistic Attitude") *STS no.* 13, p. 25.
30. This was related to me by Komatsu Hiroshi, who saw the print while working at the Film Center.
31. Toda, pp. 26–27.
32. Tamura Yukihiko, *"Morocco," Kinema Junpō* (1 February, 1931).
33. I would like to thank Aaron Gerow for helping me flesh out these points after reading an early draft of this article. His dissertation is groundbreaking work on the Pure Cinema Movement: A.A. Gerow, *Writing a Pure Cinema: Articulations of Early Japanese Film* (Dissertation for the University of Iowa, 1996).
34. Ota Tatsuo, "Sūpā Impōzu ni Okeru Nihongo no Hinkon" ("The Poverty of Japanese Language of Spoken Titles"), *Nihon Eiga,* vol. 4, no. 5 (May 1939), p. 51.
35. Quoted in Hugo Friedrich, "On the Art of Translation" ("Zur Frage der Ubersetzungkunst"), trans. Rainer Schultze and John Biguenet, in *Theories of Translation—An Anthology from Dryden to Derrida,* ed. Rainer Schultze and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 12–13.
36. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Translation" ("Ubersetzungen"), trans. Sharon Sloan, in *Theories of Translation,* p. 61.
37. Antje Ascheid's article on dubbing attempts to avoid these traps, but falls into others because of an inadequate theorization of translation itself.

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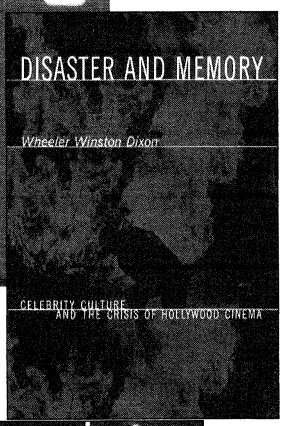

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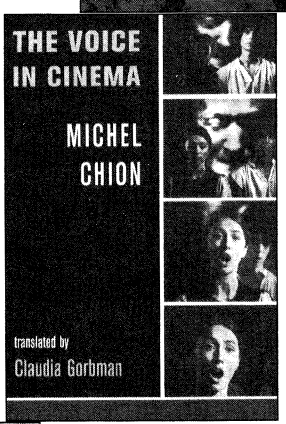

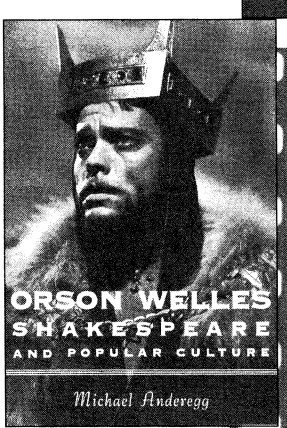

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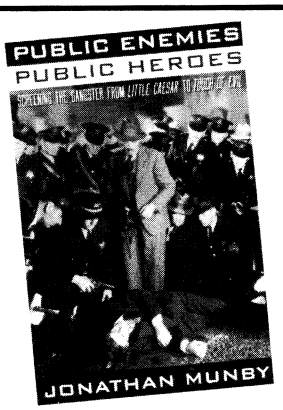
38. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 60.
39. Robert Stam and Ella Shohat report the following: "In the late 60s and 70s, French leftists reportedly 'kidnapped' a Kung Fu film as *La Dialectique peut-elle casser les briques?* ('Can the Dialectic Break Bricks?') with incendiary subtitles. A sequence of devastating karate blows would be subtitled: 'Down with the bourgeoisie!'" See their "The Cinema after Babel: Language, Difference, Power," *Screen* vol. 26, nos. 3–4 (May–August 1985), pp. 35–59. *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* is actually a low-budget Japanese detective film with Allen's parodic dubbing on the soundtrack. One could also imagine an abusive dubbing, although ultimately dubbing is mired in corruption because it completely erases the experience of foreign sound, one of the most crucial material aspects of language. These examples are also curious for their parody, which indulges in the abusive translator's pleasure in experiencing the foreign, while sharing the corrupt translator's domination of the source text.
40. Donald Richie, "Donald Richie on Subtitling Japanese Films," *Mangajin* 10 (1991): p. 16.
41. Ibid., p. 16.



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Jeffrey Skoller

Reinventing Time Or

The Continuing Adventures of Lemmy Caution in Godard's *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero*

If the rubble-strewn cities of Europe were the mise-en-scène for the postwar cinema of Neo-realism with its melodramatic examinations of the brutality of Fascism, then the empty space left by the removal of the Berlin Wall in 1989 is the image of an emerging post-Cold War cinema. Using the same modern technology with which Europe destroyed itself, the Germans (and their occupiers) rebuilt West Germany after WW II, thus rendering virtually invisible the convulsive destruction of the war. Not only had the geography of Europe changed, but many of the cities themselves —monuments to 2000 years of Western culture—had been destroyed, only to be rebuilt as modern urban centers. The Berlin Wall, that one-hundred-plus-mile seam that stretched across Germany, stood as a constant reminder that the war had occurred and continued now

as the geo-politics of occupation and domination. The Berlin Wall defined a *West* in opposition to an *East* necessary for the logic of Cold War domination of Europe by the superpowers.

The removal of the Wall ushered in a new stage in the globalization of capitalism and presents a new set of questions for the historicizing of the entire postwar period.[1] Of all the different kinds of films made after the fall of the Berlin Wall (documents, dramas, histories, and commentaries), few attempt to take up the complexity of the meaning of the rise and fall of the Wall in its broader temporal, cultural, and philosophical implications for the representation of European history. One filmmaker (among others[2]) who has is Jean-Luc Godard who, in *Allemagne année 90 neuf zero (Germany Year 90 Nine Zero)* (France, 1991), uses the fall of the Berlin Wall to question the very possibility of history as a useful discourse for understanding what happened and what is happening.

Godard frames the event through the specificity of the medium of cinema to evoke a sense of the passing of a period of European history that at once contains the specific event that occurred and the equally important ephemeralities, multiplicities, and lapses of meanings that can emerge from an event of such magnitude. In this sense, *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* is a 20th-century fin-de-siècle work of art that speaks to something that has just passed. For Godard, what has passed is nothing less than the potential of the 20th century with all its ideals and atrocities. This film is not about creating a sense of the loss of German identity resulting from the division and reunification of the country; instead it shows the ruins, the shards of a European culture that self-destructed. Rather than presenting narratives of events that led up to the building and dismantling of the Wall with accompanying sociological or political explications, as do the dramatic and documentary films that have been made on the subject since 1989,[3] the filmmaker chooses a poetic form to create an elegy for an unrecoverable past. For Godard, speaking of the 20th century is to speak of cinema, and cinema is the central medium for thinking (of) the 20th century. Throughout his career, one of Godard's major themes has been to find a cinematic form with which to think through the complexity of large historical events as they manifest themselves in the consciousness of postwar, late capitalist European society.

From his first feature film in 1959, the history of cinema has been the surface on which all Godard's discourses have taken place. The reflexive gesture of a meta-discourse on the medium being used and woven into the body of the work is essential to the critique of contemporary European life that runs through his oeuvre.

> From the beginning, Godard has worked within cinema's very flesh, incorporating the images of others with his own; today he incorporates his own with those of others. The result is this art of superimposing two and three images on top of each other so as to make just one. (Leutrat, 30)

In doing this, he used Pop Art strategies that created a style by working with specific genres, from the pulp crime thriller to the Hollywood musical, with such a level of self-consciousness that this kind of celebration and critique became "Godardian" and made him one of the most famous figures of the sixties cultural revolution.

In *Alphaville* (France, 1965), Godard appropriates elements from the Hollywood detective and sci-fi genres as translated through 1950s French pulp thrillers. Lemmy Caution, played by the American Eddie Constantine, the left-over private eye from such films as *Im Banne des blonden Satans (Poison Ivy),* poses as a reporter to investigate the city of Alphaville, an Orwellian city run by a computer and mad scientists. Alphaville is populated by tranquilized automatons who quietly follow orders and have no emotional life. Any expression of humanist tendencies is met with death. Through the use of a high-contrast noir style, Godard transforms modern Paris into an anonymous postwar "any-city-what-ever"[4] of neon signs and high-rise buildings and endless highways. Granite-faced Caution endlessly wanders the night-time streets of Alphaville, exploring the image of the totalitarian, high-tech Europe which is a blend of depersonalized late capitalist urban signifiers and post-1956 Soviet-socialist control.

By 1991, the "Godardian" style of the essay of pastiche has entered the language of cinema to the extent that he begins to use his own work and the cult of personality around his name and style as a meta-discourse like the way that he once used classical Hollywood cinema. Hence he is able to resurrect Lemmy Caution (using Constantine in one of his last performances) for his film *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero.* The film becomes at once a meditation on the history of Europe and a home movie in which Godard writes himself into the history of postwar Europe.

It turns out that Lemmy Caution has been quietly living undercover behind a hair salon in East Berlin. He is discovered by German film historians who have

just gained access to the East German archives with the fall of the Wall and GDR government—which has rendered useless Caution's reason for being a spy. He is cast onto a now deterritorialized German landscape without any coherent history or border to legitimate his occupation. Caution spends the rest of the film wandering through East Berlin and environs, making his way to the West. The wandering character is a means of exploring a physical place, which is actually the filmmaker's central concern—as it was in *Alphaville.* To do this, a coherent storyline is displaced to the margins of the film. This strategy can be traced to the early Neo-realist cinema of Rossellini, namely his 1946 *Germany Year Zero* (which Godard's film both acknowledges and continues). Like Rossellini, who went to Berlin to see what was left after World War II, Godard comes to Berlin to see its condition after the Cold War. Godard resurrects Lemmy Caution as a vehicle for exploration just as Rossellini created Edmund, a German youth who wanders through the bombed-out rubble of a defeated Berlin. In both films, the narratives are simple, schematic, and at times nonexistent: the wandering character is used to show Berlin as a deterritorialized world of signifiers of past events.

Writing on the emergence of Neo-realism in film, Gilles Deleuze marks it as a shift in emphasis from "sensory-motor motivating situations" (plot-driven scenes) to "pure optical and sound situations" (the document of the place where the camera is filming) when he writes:

> The characters were found less and less in sensory-motor "motivating" situations, but rather in a state of strolling, of sauntering or of rambling which defined pure *optical and sound situations.* The action-image tended to shatter, whilst the determinate locations were blurred, letting any-spaces-what-ever rise up where the modern affects of fear, detachment, but also freshness, extreme speed and interminable waiting were developing. (*Cinema 1,* 120–21)

It is on these "any-space-what-evers" that Godard is able to hang a wide range of possibilities for talking about the meaning of the Berlin Wall. Once set up, the narrative detaches from the film like a booster rocket launching a space capsule. In the case of *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* it is a time capsule that contains nothing less than the intellectual and cultural history of Germany. It is in the problem of how to narrate such a history that Godard takes on cinema as the medium through which all history must speak. The opening voice-over of *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* speaks critically of the problems of monological historical narration and the way it closes off the possibilities of multiplicity and the interpenetration of different perspectives and perceptions within time. An unseen voice asks:

> Can we recount time? Time as such in and of itself? No in truth it would be an insane undertaking. A recital saying, time passed, flowed . . . ran its course and so on. No sane man could sustain such a narration. It is a bit like holding for an hour one single note, one chord and trying to pass it off as music.

The musical form of the fugue with its fluid interpenetration of contrasting themes, variations, harmonies, and rhythms becomes the formal metaphor for *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero.* The film itself is structured as a series of variations, each thematized in an indirect way that alludes to the relationship between a political and cultural past.

The first variation, *"The Last Spy,"* introduces Lemmy Caution. He is an artifact of the history of cinema who is there to find clues to the missing German history. We hear philosophical musings. Are these clues? (After all, Germany is the land of philosophy.) Hegel is introduced with a quote, "Philosophy begins with the ruin of the actual world." A couple is seen studying Hegel: the man reads in German; the woman in French. They argue not about his ideas but about the problems of translation between German and French. This suggests a larger problem of translation between borders, between languages, between subjectivities in a unifying post-Cold War Europe. The problem of translation is that it, as Frieda Grafe suggests, "is not true to the word, but rather changes or, even worse, distorts the word in order to make it understandable, because when language moves to a different territory words necessarily takes on a different shape." (*Whose History,* 5) In a unified Europe there is no longer a narrative of nation that can bridge the necessary recontextualization of meaning as ideas move across borders and cultures. Rather than ideas becoming universalized knowledge, they are simply ill-remembered signifiers of a vague memory.

The couple is seen in a library full of books, but the quotations they are reading, their argument over translation, and the books themselves seem simply useless. "It is the silence of these countless books that frightens me," Lemmy Caution at one point muses voice-off. While the couple is reading, Godard moves us back to another time—Nazi Germany. Is this what

the German world of ideas produced? The past is cinema: footage from the Jewish ghettos, idealized Aryan imagery from German films of the period. Godard cuts freely between past and present, the voices of the two philosophers in French and German continue over. We see a tree. The woman's voice off: "World history is not the place for happiness." These are empty signifiers of the great philosophical traditions of Germany which are of little meaning in the face of the images of the past. The concentration camp Buchenwald was built around Goethe's tree. An intertitle appears on the screen: HISTORY OF SOLITUDE.

These are what Deleuze describes as pure time-images which are separate from one another. They are not linked narratively through continuity conventions, or by description, or even thematically. Central to the film is the situation of the narrator in the contemporary representation of history. As the film states, it is a role that has become "impossible, difficult, lonely . . . absent and present oscillating between two truths, that of document and that of fiction."

This oscillation produces new forms of narration which more adequately represent social, political, epistemological, and aesthetic developments in modern society. Deleuze suggests that "the postwar period has greatly increased the situations in which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe." (*Cinema 2,* xi.) In cinematic terms, he has productively described this as a shift from the "movement-image" to the "time-image." The movement-image, largely referring to classical narrative cinema, is an indirect and therefore illusionistic image of time in which discreet images act upon one another to create a durational whole of the story. The time-image, on the other hand, is a direct image of time in which the durational whole is contained within each shot and is not directly connected to the prior and proceeding shots, each shot deframing the previous one, thus producing a more fragmented, elliptical sense of time and meaning. The time-image is a cinema of accumulation as opposed to narration. In this sense, Godard's famous adage, "not one image after another, rather one image *plus* another," might be restated as not one moment of time after another, rather one moment of time plus another. Deleuzian philosophy points to the need for thinking the questions and situations of the post-Cold War reality with a new relation to temporality. Godard's cinematic language of accumulation becomes an important model for Deleuze's philosophy of multiplicity and becoming as a process in modern thought. It is the "irrational cuts" of non-linked images and sounds which make totalizing narratives of nation impossible. Deleuze writes:

> Ultimately, there are no longer any rational cuts but only irrational ones. There is thus no longer association through metaphor or metonymy, but relinkage on the literal image; there is no longer linkage of associated images, but only relinkages of independent images. (*Cinema 2,* 214)

It is in their accumulation that they create their own context and create open readings, both as images on their own and as juxtapositions.

Germany Year 90 Nine Zero is a time-poem and elegy in the steely grays and blues of Northern European light. The film picks up again on Lemmy Caution wandering around East Berlin. There is no sunshine. We see a sign marking what was once a Gestapo headquarters. Next to it someone is selling pieces of the Berlin Wall, Nazi memorabilia, and books. History is something to be bought and sold. East Berlin is now seen as a flea market of allusion and references to a past of German culture and ideologies. But it is all inert, eerily silent. Caution meets up with Sigmund Freud's Dora. Dora turns into Goethe's Charlotte Kestner, and this begins the second variation: "Charlotte in Weimar."

Caution and Dora/Charlotte wander through East Berlin encountering German history: Schiller's home, the monument to Pushkin, an image of Kafka, the site of the murder of Rosa Luxemburg, and worn and corroded statues which are simultaneously artifacts of a past time and of the corrosion from the passage of time in the present. Intercut are other time images: paintings, photographs, snippets of 18th-, 19th-, and 20th-century music. It is in this constant movement between registers of artifact, document, dramatic sequences, sounds, and musical quotations that Godard constructs history as a playground of the dead. One becomes overwhelmed by the references. What film is that snippet from? What painting is that, what quotation or piece of music? There are references within references, as in Liszt's piano transcription of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Through this overflow of references the guarantee of knowledge as a means of understanding becomes impossible. Like the scraps of the memory of an education that once constituted a whole nation which no longer exists, these image and sound quotations create an out-of-field echo at once completely foreign and oppressively familiar. Has the filmmaker even remembered them correctly?

Eddie Constantine as Lemmy Caution with Claudia Michelson as Dora (left) and as Charlotte (right).

Like a home movie, Godard interrogates his own memory: How does a Swiss national, known internationally as a French auteur, re-member a Germany through his own figure in relation to a Europe which no longer exists as it did in his childhood? As Frieda Grafe writes:

> [Godard] refers to Germany as his *patrie imaginaire,* the source of his imagination, the fertile ground of his mind. "When I think back, it was Germany that formed me and by which I let myself be formed. By it Alone." . . . As a result of the German culture he had absorbed, Godard shares a feeling of guilt. He sees himself in the ranks of a generation of children whose parents allowed Hitler to rise. His reproach is directed at his own parents: they said nothing about it to him after they first kindled his love for Germany. (*Whose History,* 10)

There is a powerful interplay between the means of making representations—the actual mechanics—and the objects that are created. Throughout the film, people are writing, playing music, drawing, and taking pictures, and Godard is making a film. There is a sense of endless production and reproduction of the world. For Godard this is his history, and history is plastic. It is something to be molded, shaped, worked on and through. He always comes back to himself—to cinema and its own plasticity as a means of shaping meaning and time. At times it is pure surface, one image next to another, a house, a person walking by a lake, the image of a book lying on the ground, a detail from a painting. Deleuze comments on such images, "What counts is . . . the interstice between images, between two images: a spacing which means that each image is plucked from the void and falls back into it" (*Cinema 2,* 179). This is now the opposite of associative montage, where there is a connective tissue between shots that must be ferreted out by the viewer. Rather, Godard is interested in the differentiation between the shots, the space *between* shots that holds them apart so there is no chain of interlinked images to form a whole. As Deleuze insists, the interstice is a form of thought, a virtuality that exists between non-linking images. For Godard, history is this and then that, which is never something that adds up to one.

Sometimes, however, the film returns to cinematic conventions that create spatial and even narrative verisimilitude. With the use of match-cutting and shot/counter-shot, we move not only through space but also across time. A woman in a museum is looking at a painting of the sea. She raises a still photo camera to her eye and presses the shutter. The painting turns into an early motion picture of the waves in motion. In

one shot, Godard has moved through the history of 18th- through 20th-century forms of representation. There are film images from other periods: Caution watches two women get out of a car in front of a hotel. They walk off screen. We cut to Caution looking at them, and then we get his point of view. All at once it is in another time period and another film (Murnau) that the two women emerge from the hotel and get into a car. We are in the black-and-white world of prewar cinema linked through the convention of match cutting. Godard has elided prewar and postwar Germany in a single cut.

Although all of this may seem unrigorous as historiography, Godard points to the complexity of the way history becomes a series of layerings, overlappings, and superimpositions. It is a model of history that is geological rather than chronological, in the sense that moments of time are sedimented and become strata. Using this as a model for thinking about historical genealogy, the past does not fall away to reveal the present as in progressivist modes of historiography, rather the past coexists simultaneously with the present as sedimented layers which then become enfolded to produce an object. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Felix Guattari use crystalline stratum as a metaphor for the co-existence of different strata of time; they write: "[T]he amorphous milieu, or medium, is exterior to the seed before the crystal has formed; the crystal forms by interiorizing and incorporating masses of amorphous material"(49). In Deleuze's own writing on cinema, the crystal metaphor continues: "What the crystal reveals or makes visible is the hidden ground of time, that is, its differentiation into two flows, that of presents which pass and that of pasts which are preserved" (*Cinema 2,* 99).

The crystal is a productive metaphor for describing the poetics of Godard's use of time and the interpenetration of the textures of past and present and image and sound. This notion of geological strata can be seen not only in temporal relations between shots, but also within the composition and mise-en-scène of individual shots. In these instances, history is not extension, one moment moving to the next, often it is *depth of field,* molded into a single frame. Lemmy Caution is walking down a road. In the distance there is an old windmill, a relic from a pre-industrial era. Into the frame, a man is pushing a late-model automobile. It comes to a stop in center frame. At that moment, a Don Quixote-like conquistador figure on horseback comes riding into the frame. The frame is now divided into four planes, each one a different moment of history. Caution asks, "Which way is the West?" Don Quixote rides past the windmill to do battle with the giant digging machine that is strip mining a field in the distance. The strip-mining machine might be seen as historicism itself. It tears away stratified layers of earth, each one a different period of time, keeping substratum that is of value to the needs of the historian and discarding the detritus that seems insignificant.

As Lemmy Caution continues his wandering, the notion of an East and West Germany begins to elide. No one he asks knows any longer which is what or where. But, suddenly and sardonically, he is in a different world: the sun is shining, there are joggers, birds singing. It is variation 6: "The Decline of the West." In the shots to follow, it is night in the city of neon signs, car dealerships, billboards, banks, and endless department stores. Has Caution returned to Alphaville? At the end of *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero,* the city is still the geological site of Godard's history. But the bleakness of East Berlin, with its historical references and artifacts of a past German nation, seem quaint compared to the malevolent and apocalyptic tone of the Western city. This is an eternal present in which there are no signs of the past. As Lemmy Caution says, "Here is where the last battle takes place." It is "the battle of money and blood." This seems to evoke the "Blood and Soil" movements of an earlier era, but today such nationalistic ideas hold little power in the face of globalization. Image and text relationships now become didactic: Godard cuts between the ominous images of the Intercontinental World Bank building with hundreds of black crows flying around it (an urban version of Van Gogh's "Cornfield with Crows," his last painting before his suicide) and disaster images from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (Germany, 1926).

For Godard, the Berlin Wall was at least a reference to a past, as grotesque a failure as it was. It was still a past that was embedded in the present and was embodied by the Wall as a physical limit, reflecting an inside and outside to the state, whether capitalist or socialist. For Godard, the Wall indicated the possibility of difference. But in his image of a world culture of late capitalism, there is no "outerland"; there is nothing onto which the present can reflect. One gets the sense that the socialist state of East Germany with its primitive apparatus for repression was, at least, still within history and producing history, and in fact needed history to function. It was the repressive present of an East Germany that guaranteed a context for the past. For the world of Western capitalism with its ever-expanding present there are no longer such needs. The late-capi-

talist state is a machine which crushes difference, temporal or otherwise.

Germany Year 90 Nine Zero ends with Lemmy Caution returning to the same kind of sterile and characterless hotel room in which *Alphaville* begins. There are the same maids and bellhops waiting to serve. Instead of the tranquilizer pills there is a television on, and the sound of the howling wind. Caution removes two thick volumes of the history of the Gestapo from his suitcase and has the maid place them under his mattress to prop up his feet while in bed. He asks (as he did in *Alphaville*) that the book by the bedside be removed. The maid refuses and says, "No sir, it's the Bible, it's always there." With that, *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* simply ends. Unlike *Alphaville,* however, there is no longer any outerland to return to and no place to ecape from. Caution's journey has not led anywhere. The signifiers of history, which for the moment remain in East Berlin, will be subsumed by the reunification of Germany, and with it a guarantee of international-style shopping malls and their attached museums. For Godard, this leaves Germany (and by extension Europe) without a past. History, as he says, "is always alone."

In this deformed narrative of nation, even the hope of a rebuilt postwar state-sponsored culture (on both sides of the Wall) produced nothing more than an image of itself.[5] Godard raises the question of the appropriation of art and artists by the state: A voice-over says, "Artists who painted under orders were the most hypocritical." Velasquez, Giotto, Dürer. Italy, Spain, Germany. "Nothing but state art—art dictated by the state. Always." There is an image of Goebbels over a swastika. The voice continues in the film's first direct mention of Nazism: "that awful Dürer, precursor and predecessor of Nazism, who put nature on canvas and killed it."

In postwar Germany, art is no longer a necessary expression of difference through notions of individual expression constructed along national boundaries, but a currency used to reconstruct an image of Germany as a state among states. The implication is that culture in the context of international capital is no longer necessary to the construction of a national identity, rather it is something to be appropriated as mise-enscène in the solipsistic drama of inter-state power relations. Hence the film's subtitle: "Solitude: A State and Variations."

Germany Year 90 Nine Zero may be Godard's bleakest work, producing a sense of futility that no amount of human ingenuity or knowledge can stop or prevent this "state machine" from reproducing itself in whatever form necessary. The Berlin Wall, both in its past physical incarnation and now in its absent presence, is like the Deleuzian crystal, now made grotesquely of concrete, where the past and the present, the virtual and the real, become indistinguishable. Between these "states"—the past of Germany, of World War II, of the Cold War, and the present with its reunification and late-capitalist condition—time becomes unstuck. For Godard, there is no chronology, one can no longer think history linearly, space becomes deterritorialized and distinctions between East and West, the past and the present, become subsumed by the specter of global capital.

Deleuze, as the philosopher of AND as opposed to IS, however, attempts to turn the implications of this kind of apocalyptic vision into possibilities for new ways of thinking that allow for dynamic networks of discursive relations between ideas, territories, and moments of time. Deleuzian thought is one of transformation or, as he describes it, "of becoming." This utopian idea is embodied by an experimental cinema—that which is a plastic grouping of spatial and temporal relations or becomings—in which unimagined events may occur. *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero,* then, despite its dark vision of the present, is closely connected to Deleuze's vision in that it demands that we think time in its multiplicities rather than in its chronologies and therefore challenges us to think our forms of representations—like history—differently.

Perhaps a film like *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* can be seen as a new kind of political cinema which, unlike the political modernisms of the past, plays the important function of creating a distinction between knowledge and thought. "Thinking or thought is defined not by what we know, but by the vitual or what is unthought. To think, Deleuze argues, is not to interpret or to reflect, but to experiment and to create" (Rodowick, 198). To see art as linked to a kind of virtuality—as is politics—is to see both as producing the potential of what is not yet available, that is, a relation of not-yet-realized "forces" which are placed in motion by the work of art. Perhaps, as Godard's film suggests, at this moment it is through experimentation in thinking and art-making that one can produce resistance to what is and even create new possibilities for what is yet to come.

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Notes

I wish to thank Scott Durham for generously sharing his many valuable insights which influenced and enriched my reading of this film.

1. See Andreas Huyssen's book *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia,* which explores the cultural impact of the division and the reunification of Germany. See especially section 1, "Time and Memory."
2. Some of the more sophisticated attempts within the avant-garde cinema that I have been able to see address the phenomenon of the Wall in more philosophical terms. These films include Ingo Kratisch and Jutta Sartory's films *O logischer Garten* (Germany, 1990) and *Site, Signified* (Germany, 1996), Daniel Eisenberg's *Persistence: Film in 24 Absences/Presences/Prospects* (USA, 1997), and Ernie Gehr's *This Side of Paradise* (USA, 1994).
3. Two examples of historicist constructions of conventionally linear Berlin Wall narratives are Margarethe von Trotta's *The Promise* (1995), a dramatic film, and Ross McElwee's *Something to Do with the Wall* (USA, 1992).
4. Here I am paraphrasing the Deleuzian notion of an "any-space-what-ever," which he describes as a space represented in modern cinema which is "no longer a particular determined space. . . . It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity . . . so that linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible." (*Cinema 1,* 109)
5. See Huyssen's essay "Escape from Amnesia: The Museum as Mass Medium" in *Twilight Memories.*

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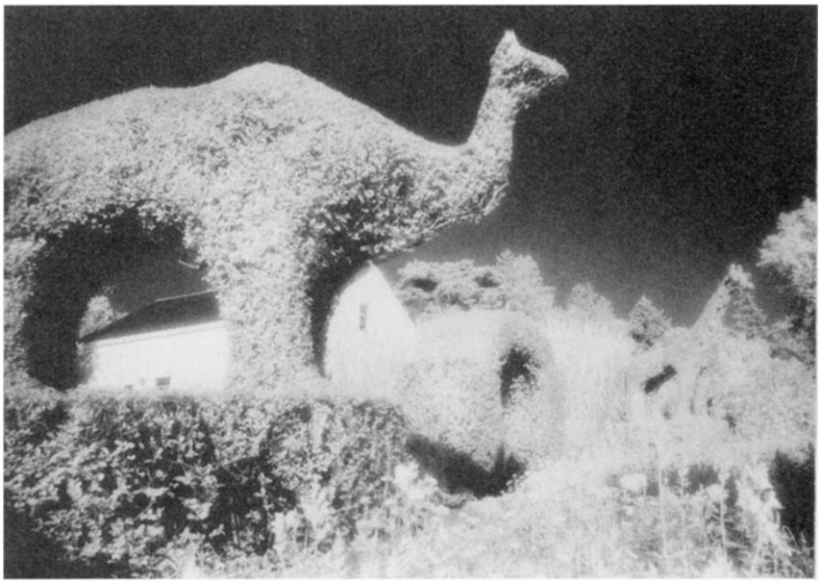
Reviews

Fast, Cheap & Out of Control

Director/producer: Errol Morris. Cinematographer: Robert Richardson. Interrotron Photography: Peter Sova. Editors: Shondra Merrill, Karen Schmeer. Music: Caleb Sampson. Sony Pictures Classics.



George Mendonça's topiary garden

Sisyphus meets Einstein in *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control,* Errol Morris's contribution to the current debate on evolution and human consciousness. It is overtly a documentary about people who tame or master nature, bending lions or boxwood to their wills, reaching up to map the surface of Mars or tunnelling into the earth to discover the hairless mole-rat. Morris's barrage of images gradually sorts itself out into four human lives, united but also isolated from the rest of mankind by their strange obsessions. Morris discovers spiritual lessons embedded in organic and inanimate matter, brought into focus by the men's explanations of what they do. The film is arguably an elegy for a humanistic vision of Man Invincible, perhaps because it was finished after the death of Morris's parents (to whom it is dedicated).

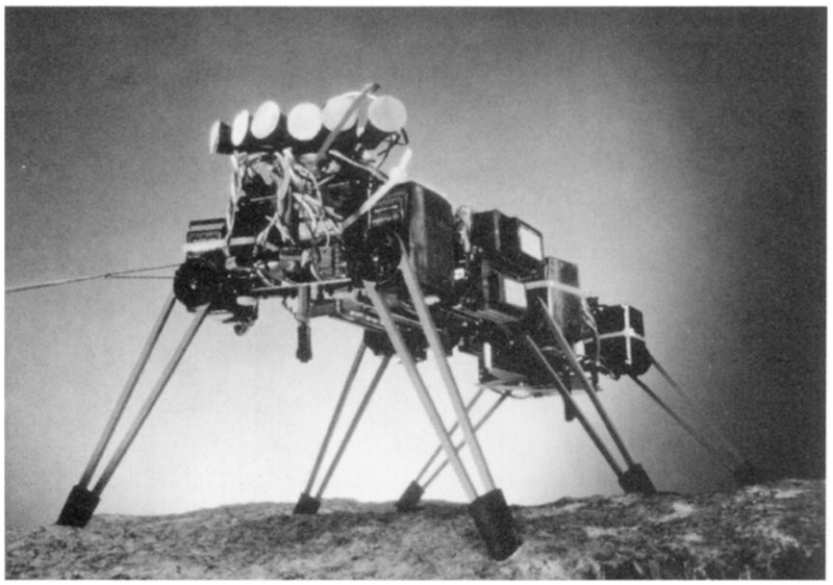
In his previous work, Morris excelled at the interview, and here again, he uses it as the organizing principle. He introduces four men who are as eccentric or focused as anybody from his previous films (pet cemetery-keepers, the Dallas police). It's safe to say that obsession itself is what attracts Morris. His thinking about the role of obsession in the modern world is conveyed more by anecdote and incident than by argument. In obsessions, human beings evince strange—even weird or humorous—traits that set them apart from the motley crowd. What this augurs for human evolution is a very popular matter of scientific and pop-scientific speculation, of course, and in *Fast, Cheap* . . . Morris ruminates on human direction, given the tendencies displayed in his four case studies.

Dave Hoover is a lion tamer whose experience has taught him that "an animal has a one-track mind. . . . You put the chair up, and . . . he has four points of interest. . . . He can't comprehend these four points. . . . His mind now is completely distracted from his original thought: Eat the man in the white pants." Dave and his lions are the first in a series of recurring images of master/subject relationships, including the mammoth, lumbering elephants in chains and shapely female acrobats performing at the behest of the ringmaster.

Ray Mendez studies hairless mole-rats and builds habitats for colonies of this mammal, which exhibits, he opines, the behavior of social insects. "People come and look," he says, ". . . to find themselves in another social animal." Mendez has an infectious enthusiasm for what he calls the "exploring and finding of animals that have absolutely nothing to do with any control that we . . . would have; that feeling that you are in the presence of life . . . irrelevant of yourself . . . see if you can get the moment where the animal is actually looking at you, and you feel there is contact: I know you are. You know I am."

Although Mendez's rodents prompt an awareness of a commonality between man and mole-rat, artificial-intelligence expert Rodney Brooks seems to feel eclipsed by the robots that are his obsession. "We're not even at cockroach stage with a.i. robots," he claims, standing in a room swarming with small, cheap models of insect-robots. Morris helps Brooks' argument along by inserting clips of Pathfinder on another planet to indicate enormous progress from the ludicrous, rogue robot smashing up an office in old movie footage that recalls the robot's origins in popular culture.

Brooks has an unblinking faith in his chosen life form: "understanding life," is gained "by building something life-like. . . . Some researchers view building these robots as the next step in evolution . . . a step beyond mere human bodies, which decay after 70 years . . .



Rodney Brooks' robot

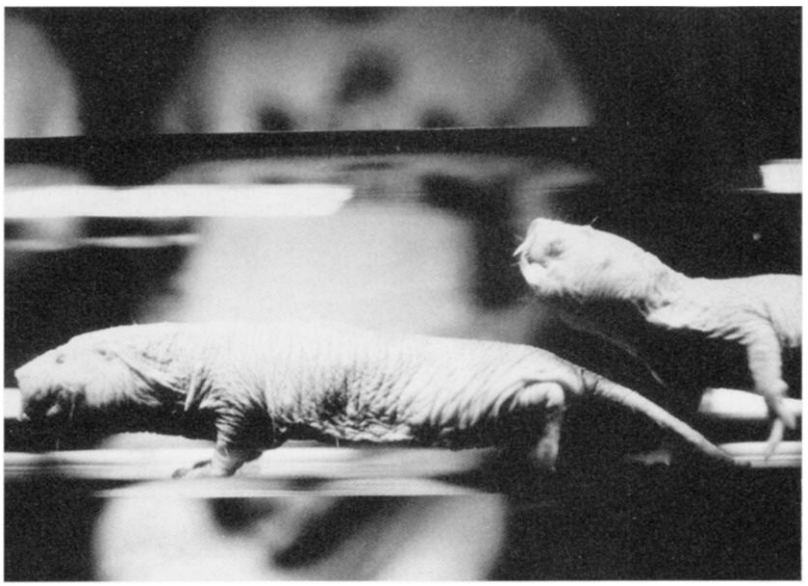
George Mendonça cultivates his garden.

building something that can reproduce at a much faster rate and carry on through the life of the universe." Because Morris punctuates much of Brooks' interview with playful images of robots, it is difficult to take Brooks' extreme views seriously. Indeed, Brooks floats the notion that human intelligence will carry on as the intelligence invested in developing robots. If we subscribe to this, we can project ourselves into a new age of exploration, when multitudes of insect-robots are launched under the banner of "fast, cheap and out of control."

In sharp contrast, we see the devotion of George Mendonça, the topiary gardener on the estate Green Animals in Providence, Rhode Island, for some 70 years. His domain may be doomed to decay, and is depicted at the end in hazy landscapes reminiscent of the Twilight of the Gods, yet Mendonça modestly presents himself as hired help—he even tells us how he fell in love with the kitchen maid and how the two of them served Green Animals and their mistress, whom we only sense in shots of an empty salon in the mansion. The union of man and plant is most striking when George shows us how he erected a scarecrow man and gave him a wife in a pricey hat. George strikes no heroic poses; he is more like Noah or Adam in the Garden. His animals are herbaceous, but no less unruly than Dave's lions. "It's just cut and wait, cut and wait," he sighs, "You're fighting the elements, getting them to do what you want." George's boxwood beasts cannot reproduce, and it is clear to George that, after him, nobody else will take over their tender care.

Morris puts together the images to depict animal, vegetable, mineral, celluloid, and even woman (acrobats) as subject to human control. The anecdotes, struggles, and small triumphs of the four men are intercut with footage of a circus, cartoons, old sci-fi films, and Saturday morning Clyde Beatty serials, thus tracking the evolution of popular entertainment. As circuses gave way to Saturday serials, so serials became B-movies, etc., right down to prime time footage of Pathfinder. Likewise, the documentary we are watching has gone beyond the watch-and-wait methods of Wiseman, Les Blank, and documentarians who quietly roll miles of footage to be edited later for verisimilitude. Morris's variant teaches us to be alert to variety and replication of the many basic elements in the worlds and worldviews presented to us first-hand.

For instance, the images that accompany mole-rat expert Ray Mendez's explanation of coordinated efforts in a mole-rat colony are of a chain of ants moving breadcrumbs, intercut with the torso of a female circus acrobat, her muscles delineated and flexed, her costume's beaded fringe swinging in a sensual rhythm. Her muscles are developed to a point of physical prowess that is as incomprehensible to the average person as the coordination and social perfection of a colony of insects, which may fumble the bread from moment to moment, but achieves its goal with uncanny determination. Reinforcing this theme of balance underlying the appearance of disorder comes another explanation, this time from Rodney Brooks, that insect-robots are



Left: Dave Hoover taming a lion; above: Mole-rats

not built for stability, but rather for instability, which is a more common challenge when negotiating a terrain, terrestrial or celestial.

The blow-up of the video images of the chain of ants creates a visual effect of almost neon-like vibration, which echoes the fringe of the acrobat; the push-and-pull effort of the ants finds a corollary in news footage of Pathfinder striking out across extra-terrestrial surfaces, bringing us back to the film's basic concern. Exactly what, if anything, is fast, cheap, or out of control? If the film's title itself is ironic—and I suspect it is—it harks back to a serious scientific proposal for space exploration once made by our champion of technology, Rodney Brooks. To wit, replacing huge robots makes exploration formidably expensive; therefore, using 100 small disposable robots simplifies the process, because the robots can be programmed to map, then die. "If it does find what it's looking for," says Brooks of an efficient exploration robot, "its life is over. It stops where it is . . . and you get this automatic map." As an explorer, that certainly sets it apart from Cortez "high on a peak in Darien," as Keats envisioned the conquistador.

Although Keats used the wrong explorer, his aim was like that of Morris, who uses the romance of these old Saturday serials to recall our innocence. The affable lion tamer, Hoover, lingers in our memory, even if he says he is but a pale imitation of the greatest lion tamer of them all, Clydè Beatty. We see Beatty's exploits: swinging from ropes onto citadels, saving maidens, liberating missionary orphans, and being colonially stalwart, in scenes from *Darkest Africa,* his own serial, which captured the imagination of young Hoover and made him literally run away with Beatty's circus. Hoover's dedication to lion-taming even had the sanction of his priest, who told his distressed mother that the world also needs lion tamers. Amen.

Why do we trust the folks Morris has lined up? In *The Thin Blue Line,* the whole point was the credibility of each witness: Could we trust what they said? Their inconsistency is what eventually enabled its subject, Randall Adams, to go free. If trusting the interviewees is the crux of *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control,* then we have to weigh the humanists, Hoover and Mendonça, whose jobs seem to be fading out, against the triumphs in technology that make Brooks and Mendez so proud of their models, as if existence as we know it could persist or be carried on in robot or mole-rat form. Is this evolution or merely the result of fast and cheap, as in our no-deposit/no-return culture?

Quibbling with Morris's subjects may not be productive in a film where Morris wants us to believe them—so much so that in order to bring his interviews closer to confession, he invented the Interrotron (two jerry-rigged TelePrompTers, modified so that Morris and his subjects are talking to each other's images on video because both cameras have a half-silvered mirror in front that functions as a monitor. The interview or A-camera runs Morris's image directly in front of

the lens. The B-camera, which is on Morris, carries an image of the interview subject being fed in from the A-camera, so that by looking at each other, they stare directly into the cameras' lenses). "There is something very important . . . about someone looking you straight in the eye," says Morris, "certainly in human communication and in communication in general. If you ask me, it is the difference between the first person and the third person." As a result, these four first-person narratives are juxtaposed in such a way as to constantly weigh the value of human life over other kinds of life—insect, beast, celluloid, or silicon.

In *Fast, Cheap . . .* Morris is definitely doing more than showing us how four men's lives have been shaped by the parts of the world that they themselves shape. The narration in the interviews is, according to Morris's comments in the production notes, more than "information about the world, [it] actually gives us information about the speaker; he reveals both his world and the radical disjunction between his world and the world at large. Looking at that disjunction is the enterprise of all my movies." As if that ambition were not grand enough, another masterful purpose is built into Morris's fast-paced cutting and high-relief expressionism. Behind the illusion of "chaos" (an apparently inexorable trend in late 20th-century intellectual history), Morris finds pattern; or rather, embedded in the visual verve of *Fast, Cheap . . .* is a debate on the value of human progress, which in turn calls for a kind of interrogation of our assumptions about the progress of film technique itself.

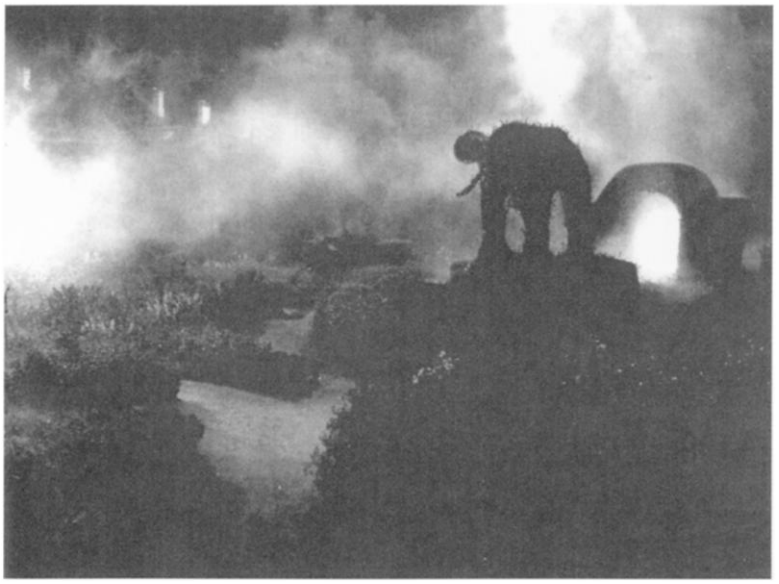
Besides found footage from the archives, Morris works with cinematographer Robert Richardson (who gave us the splashy vulgarity of *Natural Born Killers* and *Casino*) to achieve film styles that differ according to the desired level of discourse with the audience. *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control* interweaves stylized, high-resolution sequences with the neon-vibrancy of video transfers to film, then contrasts this with the archaic style of old sci-fi or photo-montage sequences of shredded American iconography. This all dashes across your field of vision in a display that hints at erudition and subtle purpose, yet remains steadfastly faux-pop. It also gallops along like television, where the average length of a shot is 3.5 seconds, and where the assumption is that the viewers' synapses connect the dots with ease. We are also trusted to sort out another interweaving: sound from one source laid over visuals from another.

Should there be any doubt about the design Morris weaves with the threads of interviews—namely, that human existence is threatened by the existence of freaky life-forms—the footage from *Darkest Africa* provides the symbol of insect-winged warriors swooping down to seize our hero after he has liberated missionaries and damsels in distress. The hierarchy from this relic of pop culture plays out in the hierarchy of interviewees (robot/liontamer/gardener/mole-rat) to come full circle. Insect-robots cruise around an M.I.T. lab and are proposed as the apotheosis of intellectual evolution, possibly even human evolution. But can Brooks be trusted, when he has so little regard for his own species?

Brooks says of his flock of robots: "A professor from Germany asked me how you tell the robot what to do, and my only answer was, I don't tell the robot what to do . . . I switch it on, and it does what is in its nature." Similarly, Errol Morris has tuned into four diverse lives, and despite the manipulation inherent in editing a film, certain elements in those lives—viewed through the kaleidoscope of Morris's own interests—have led him inexorably to a fin-de-siècle fear of the fragility of life. In the final sequence, we witness the lion tamer retiring and passing his baton to a kinder, gentler tamer who sticks her head in the lion's mouth. Then footage from *Darkest Africa* shows the lost city collapsing, a volcano spewing, and our hero Beatty scrambling for his life, before we return to the brave new world of a robot on lunar terrain, as the circus elephants depart. We see a storm looming over Green Animals, and George the gardener with his shears in his hand holding an umbrella against the raging elements. This bleak conclusion reminds us of the evanescence of human existence: not much survives. Creativity is our only consolation.

In an age and medium that relentlessly insists on celebrity, Morris celebrates ideas. He uses relatively unknown people as his dramatis personae, focusing on their knowledge, labor, and dedication as a microcosm of human progress. The major idea of this film revolves around consciousness, beginning at the level of the mole-rat and arriving at the point where artificial intelligence carries forth human intelligence until human knowledge and being persist as pure ideas. Implicit in this concept is the death of homo sapiens, or as Rodney Brooks dubs it, "carbon-based life," as if to replace carbon with silicon is nothing more than a new and improved version of life.

Death, however, is the dilemma; emphasized by the way Morris encapsulates the film with a visual death knell culled from a macabre "bit" at the circus. In the beginning as well as in the final sequence of the film, a clown races across the screen with a skeleton tied



A storm looms over Green Animals

to his back, creating the impression that it's chasing him. Filmed in grainy black and white, this corny vaudeville act sets a droll tone and suggests that death is just a circus act away—unless, somehow, the wizards of artificial intelligence can rescue the entire human comedy. Spliced into these death-chases are the elephants, lumbering off in heavy contrast as the music fades. To be sure, the off-key midway music that lends much of the film a jaunty recherché quality owes as much to the techno-artifice of Philip Glass's studio as to Federico Fellini's famous organ-grinding themes. There is no aspect of *Fast, Cheap, & Out of Control* that Errol Morris has not subjected to the traditional versus modernist tug-of-war.

Will a time come when the modifier "artificial" no longer makes a meaningful distinction? Will we assume the life of robots is subject to certain laws of evolution and also attribute to them a high culture/low culture dichotomy, i.e., HAL versus R2D2? Of course, it's not just the robots that terrorize us. Fast, cheap and outta control is just what everyone most fears about modern times, from Charlie Chaplin at the assembly line to video porn in *Boogie Nights.* And in watching the many layers of life that Errol Morris has assembled, we are very much like Ray Mendez watching his mole rats: "This is not a form of scientific observation. It's a form of self-knowledge."

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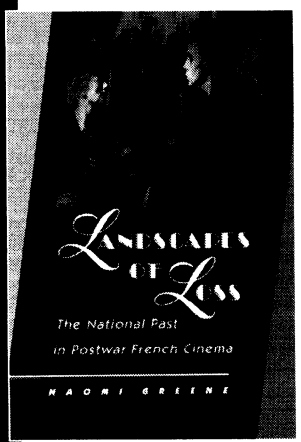

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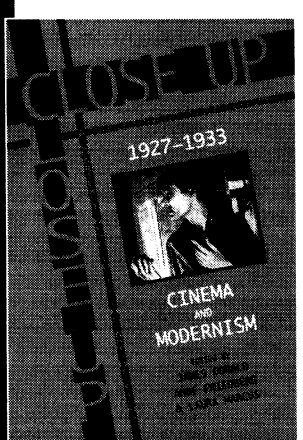

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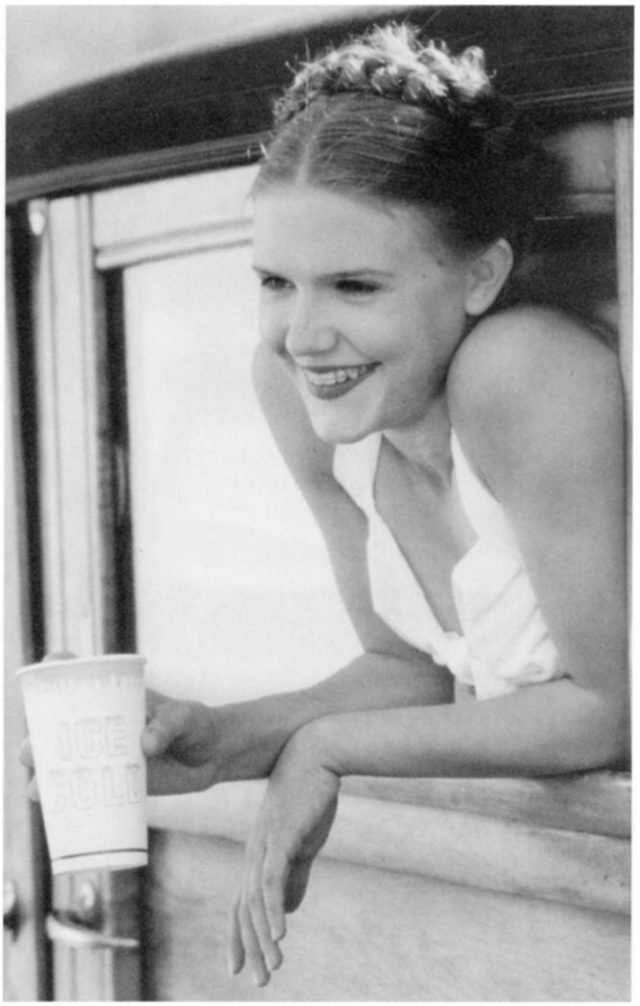
Lolita

Director: Adrian Lyne. Producers: Mario Kassar, Joel B. Michaels. Writer: Stephen Schiff. Cinematographer: Howard Atherton. Music: Ennio Morricone. Showtime.



The *Lolita* remake has been allowed to muddy these chaste shores after two years in European quarantine, and in this case the remake really is a remake, as distinct from its precursor as leafy green is from forest black. Even we who have loved the 1962 Kubrick film knew it elided much that was unforgettable on the page; enough, certainly, to allow for a second take. The novel stands formal and integral and untouched as the two films regard it from their own oblique angles, catching certain textual truisms, glancing off others. Taken together, as complementary contradictions, they come close to capturing the novel's wonders.

The novel is as funny as sordid can be, and vice versa. Nabokov's humor is inseparable from his sense of the hidden, and he offers neither of these delicately; as piddling social satire, they combine to form the rot at the center of Humbert's soon-to-be-attacked heart as he writes his prison *pensées.* Comedy is deadly, death comic. Humor and ridicule have the power to kill, as when poor Charlotte is driven into the traffic by Humbert's diary of cackles and disdain. The illicit has the power to will murder—Humbert's execution of Quilty, carried out because he cannot fathom that illicit part of Lolita that would choose the indifferent pervert over his own tender, obsequious pedophilia. Nabokov's famously ecstatic prose, full of funny allusions and clever acrostic ploys and doublings-back, sprays his story with an exquisite perfume, but it never quite covers the stench of that rotting heart, which is not only Humbert's but the novel's. "It has bits of marrow sticking to it," says the character of his narrative, "and blood, and beautiful bright-green flies."

Kubrick went for the comedy, the macabre in the comedy, and found there the story of a squirming European pedant with a Pygmalion fixation on a sexy, mischievous, but finally fiercely conventional and rather dull American girl. As commercial (or merely narrative) film, this *Lolita* is an unwieldy object, lumpen in shape, dramatically diffuse, often banal; and despite this it has a near-greatness that issues from its actors and a pervading dank humor. Its anomaly is the latitude the director allows for subversive comedy and sideways-moving improvisation within the gilded, boxy frames of an otherwise four-square Hollywood literary adaptation. Scenes are dictated not by plot mechanics but by actorly rhythm and the natural life span of a comic interrelation between jarring personalities. It is Kubrick's only film in which, from first to last, he allows his actors to dominate space and spectacle rather than mug tightly in the constricted zones his monomaniac genius has allotted for them. To the extent one savors the visuals it is only because they have innocently, delightedly captured James Mason drunk in a bathtub; Sue Lyon's bacon-stuffed mouth sneering at Mother; or the Peter Sellers speed freak dropping the mask for a moment, chortling at his own absurdist riff on normality.

The rest of its achievement is how it breathes its singular atmosphere of suburban murk, as unwholesomely wholesome as a moldering loaf of Wonderbread—an accumulation of small twists, behavioral intangibles floating in a velvety black and white, encompassing the varieties of post-Kinsey American kink from Quilty's epicene fencing with Mr. Swine the night manager to a neighbor's coy suggestion of a wife-swap ("John and I, we're *both* broad-minded"). Kubrick

catches the beautiful bright-green flies. Considering its time and place, his film is a remarkably eerie and unstable piece of mass-market absurdism, whispering of perverse delights and deaths under all the brushed and brocaded surfaces of a film that with the sound turned off could be mistaken for *The Parent Trap.*

The new film's presumption is that far more than its predecessor it will take Nabokov as writ, at least insofar as this can allow it to diverge from Kubrick. Firstly in physical detail: Lyne orchestrates a 40s period both audial (Lolita singing to novelty hits) and visual (close-ups on archaic iceboxes, radios, automobile ashtrays) where Kubrick opted for the up-to-date. More generally, and impressively, there is a concentration on despair and derangement over comedy. Lyne flirts with satire but his heart is not in this by now benign aspect—the meat here is sex and death, the seduction of the agressively youthful innocent, the ruin of the seducer. The Stephen Schiff screenplay, describing a narrative circle more sensible than the first film's, retains psychological detail Kubrick excised—hazy flashback to the original nymphet demon in the Humbert psyche, a quality of latent pathology in the titular girl's knowingness, and a voice-over patched from our narrator's most self-flagellating insights.

This seriousness, though wallowed in, isn't betrayed. Adrian Lyne, a third-rate stylist (textbook editing, post-Gothic trumpery) and fifth-rate thinker (flashy sex on the brain), has made a careful, second-rate *Lolita*—which as it turns out is more than nothing, for Kubrick's film also was second-rate.

Lyne (*9 1/2 Weeks, Fatal Attraction, Indecent Proposal*) has been identified with a lack of aesthetic ethics—a technician's love of the effective effect, reliance on shock in cutting, insidious politics that rise like weeds from his favored fables of Womanly snakes loosed in the gardens of rational Man. So it isn't surprising that in its seriousness his *Lolita* should constitute a near-immersion in "Masterpiece Theatre" visuals: a soft-edged image and conventional framing, slow-rolling rhythm that subjugates lust with cool sophistication and situates as many scenes as possible in proximity to meadows, forests, shrubs. Scenes are as measured as medicine, fed the viewer through a formal construction of close-ups, vaguely subjective shots, reverse angles, cutaways to hands engaged in fussily detailed business. This sort of borrowed art, a congealing of good taste, is the talented hack's idea of serious. It's more elegant than Kubrick, but the price is a burden and studiousness the earlier film's irreverence easily threw off despite its cumbersome length.

And yet, split thus against itself, the movie haunts. It contains a hard center of melancholy. In its way it is tough and rigorous, because Lyne is mesmerized by the tale's downward spiral—ordinary human unpleasantness recovered and, to some extent, redeemed. Much of this strain exists in the screenplay, which selectively dices the novel for its lowest scenes of humiliation, arranges them artfully in a descension dwindling to the vanishing point and pitiful realization of the final scene. But even more it is in camerawork which gets harder and better as it goes. Lyne deserves

Above left: Dominique Swain as Lolita.

Right: Jeremy Irons as Humbert and Dominique Swain

The green-eyed monster. Charlotte (Melanie Griffith) watches the "lovers."

credit for the precise staging of humiliation, the cultivation of actor's face and body into registers of non-diegetic feeling, camera placement which at one moment is sufficiently near the action to capture human volatility, at another remote enough to turn volatility into abstraction. He must do both, often in the same scene, for the art and tension of this story rest at the intersection of the abstract and the real, somewhere between Humbert's fantasy and Lolita's reality.

Example of how both interact is a three-way talk on a porch swing between Humbert, Lolita, and Charlotte, played well and straight by the actors as the dialogue makes fairly explicit points on mother-daughter sexual jealousy. Lyne's piquant undertext throughout, achieved with surprising, rude cuts that corrupt the measured surface of the scene, is of Lolita's physical intimidation of Humbert, her hands, feet, and arms in constant attack on his stoic manly limbs, his masochistic pleasure in the secret display. Fun, but sick fun. Another, even better example: a late scene of the two in bed, clawing violently over loose coins (she has raised her price mid-session), catches a curdled hysteria as it darts from tight to medium shot and back, a fierce thrusting of flying hair, gauze-obscured mouths—degradation played without self-consciousness, emotional impoverishment as a fragmented action piece. This isn't even fun. The quick scene hurts all the more for how it is thrown away, served as filler under a length of summary narration.

The film is impressively erotic. Impressive because it skirts the merely voyeuristic while doing all it can to characterize through precise physical action the dynamics of the sexual relationship, dynamics which change with each encounter. The first comingling between timid Hum and whispering Lo is realized delicately by a camera casting a wide eye, taking in white sheets and sunlight, soft cutting between the faces—lingering especially on Irons' priceless boyish giggle as Lolita slips out her retainer. We look down on him, up at her: Who has control here? Their final intimacy is rape, with Humbert beginning as attacker and ending as abject supplicant, a scene remarkable for its implication of the unseen penis as a siphon transferring power from man to girl. By this point we are looking down on her, up at him: again the presumption of control is complicated by viewpoint. Most frightening is a scene halfway between these two, with him apparently napping in his chair, her on his leg, enjoying the funnies. Spontaneously Lolita masturbates herself on Humbert's leg, and Lyne visibly must resist the impulse to porn up the sadness of a rocking-chair orgasm in a cheap motel on a dusty afternoon. But his slow zoom upon reaching the lovers melts into a premature fade, and sadness overpowers sex. Here we see both characters head on, neither looking at the other. It is their only moment of sexual equality.

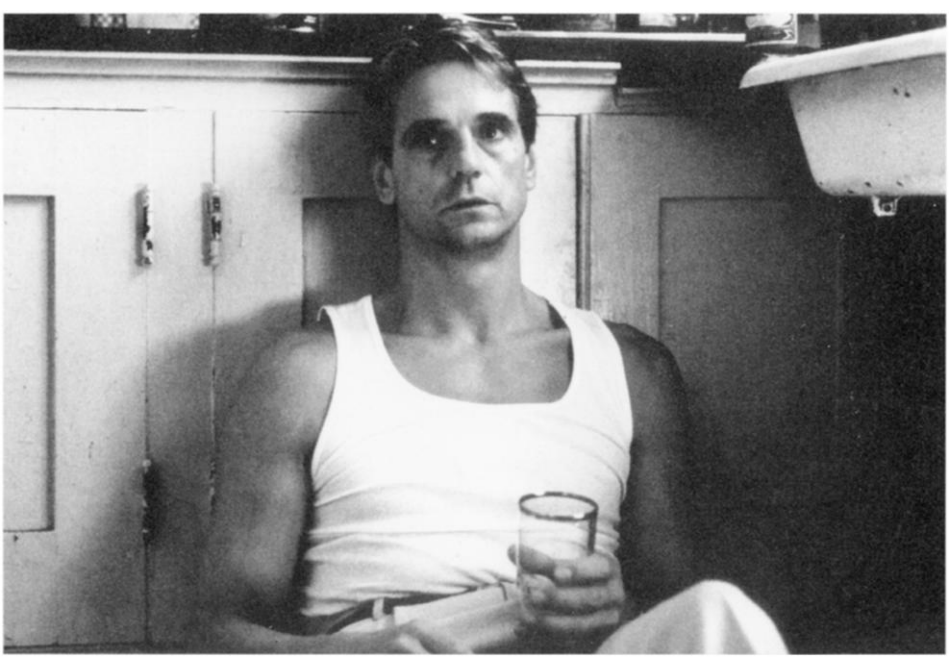
The implication that power can be shared, transferred, ambiguous in such situations is neither politically correct nor morally exculpatory of child molesters, but it is emotionally valid and as real a perception as can be caught about these characters. It's the perception that lodges that melancholy at the heart of this *Lolita* and takes it to its necessary depths, which are perhaps more subtle than those of Kubrick. And in each

case Lyne, summoning empathy from behind his mastery of sleaze and commerce, has made the perception alive with his eye.

This even though he elsewhere dawdles on tasteful frou-frou; disrupts visual and rhythmic integrity to no great purpose with tricks from an old bag (shock cuts to a bug-zapper as Quilty baits the nervous pedophile); and films a Humbert-Quilty showdown that is helplessly ugly, revolted at nakedness and glibness, not a transformation of the sordid but the plain, gross thing itself. The surprise seems to be that Lyne's good instincts increase in proportion to the sorrow of the material. It ends up not a simple, wet sorrow, but something more astringent, aggravated by a clash of ingredients, impulses, motives.

So, just as Kubrick's comic extrapolations defeated his own indifferent pacing, Lyne's fascination with the story's fatal momentum survives his first bout with a high, gelid seriousness. His *Lolita* is a combination of prestige-picture quality and queasy despair whose ultimate effect is of a messy and harrowing woe. Movies exerting such a low, persistent pull to the dregs of a story are scarcely common. The last may have been Todd Solondz's *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1996), a brisk, bitter masochism about an ugly schoolgirl's social damnation at the hands of, among others, a girl named Lolita. And there was the clinical decay of Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1988), which also gave a Jeremy Irons tour de force nowhere to go but down. The stronger sense, though, is of Eastern Europe. Early on in *Lolita* there is a preponderance of stars and stripes (a trope soon discarded), but more than anything American, the film in its echt European mood resembles those long-ago life-slices of the Prague Spring, *Loves of a Blonde* or *Closely Watched Trains,* that devolved from modest mirth to bleak apprehensions of abysmal lives and dead ends. This class of film seeks a refuge in glancing observations, found romance, and not coincidentally, the redemptive cachet of youth; but in it youth is always wasted, romance poisoned at the root, and possibility consigned to the middle distances of a barren landscape.

All of which was implicit in Nabokov's novel—as was the particular sort of comedy that Kubrick made of it. The two *Lolita*s are prime material for someone's college course on Film and Adaptation: in essence they divide the novel cleanly between them, each taking one cache of riches while leaving the greater treasure—and then, the accomplishment, succeeding even while being so limited. Is it in spite or because of this limit that they have succeeded? Certainly the latter, since neither film suggests it could replicate Nabokov's patho-comic integration even if it wanted to. Kubrick's comedy borrows drama and Lyne's drama borrows comedy, but both do badly by what is opposite to their natures: poignancy in Kubrick consists of Nelson Riddle music rising to meet an emotion that isn't there, while humor in Lyne is the smirk of recognition that one of



Physical misery for Humbert

Nabokov's wittier lines has been reproduced by the mouth of an actor. Each film is an instance of moviemakers consciously avoiding a level of complexity—in theme, performance, psychology—they cannot engage, and extrapolating from their single focus a world familiar from the novel but unique in itself. That Lyne has followed the pathetic implications of the story is, if not a greater imaginative act than Kubrick's, probably a tougher one: he ignores the bright-green flies but comes away with some of the marrow.

Depressive material more than any other kind requires its actors to be anchors for action we would otherwise emotionally resist, and each of the two stars is given his or her abiding specialty, an identity of body and carriage: for Jeremy Irons' Humbert it is a lithe physical misery suggesting incontinence more than tumescence, while Dominique Swain's Lolita, chicken-dancing in the living room, comes across on goony charm, her face an unnerving glaze of self-centeredness. Interiorized in both performances is foreknowledge of the characters' fates, a spying of the downward spiral. There is a bitter logic to the way they interact, both with each other and with the camera: she seems constantly in motion, while he, a wilting licorice stick at the center of the screen, is whipped by the camera this way and that. Swain is particularly amazing in giving the impression of outward-pushing acting while remaining almost entirely opaque, insulated, an all but unreadable physiognomy: her face occasionally grins between long stretches of scary impassivity which suggest the inner life of a morose gangster.

This is not a great film, merely a nagging one, and disarming in its nag. The picture's grip on its true grim self is too tenuous for it to be anything like great, even the near-great of Kubrick. But Lyne has found a core of unmelodramatic doom and by observing a certain discipline he carries it through to a last scene in which the film's elements, elsewhere at war, are fused. It is unexpectedly perfect, this ending: as Humbert reaches his tether's end on a picturesque hillside, blood staining one cheek like an ambiguous cancer, the meadow-mongering of Lyne's seriousness is joined to his insistence on the characters' misery. At that moment, one feels loss. If false solemnity is this Lolita's folly, suppressed pain is its living, grumbling *bête noire*.

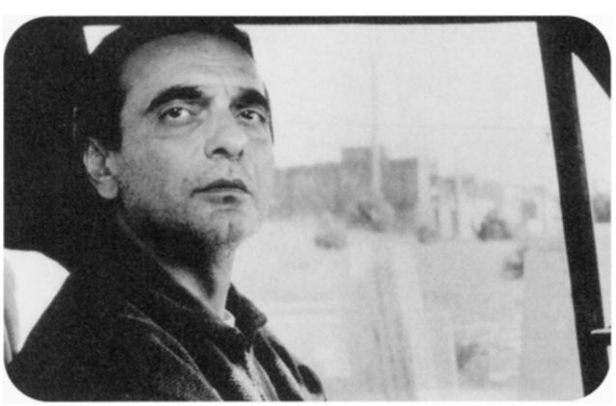
Devin McKinney is a contributor to *Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Cinema and Screen Violence* (Rutgers University Press, 1999). He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Taste of Cherry

Director/producer/writer: Abbas Kiarostami.
Cinematographer: Homayun Payvar. Zeitgeist Films.

The kind of films that win the Palme d'Or at Cannes usually wear their ambition on their sleeves, practically jumping in the spectators' face and screaming "Love me! I'm a masterpiece!" Yet *Taste of Cherry,* which split the 1997 Palme d'Or with Shohei Imamura's *The Eel,* is one of Kiarostami's smallest-scale films yet, with a cast of four, an exclusive use of exteriors and a tendency to alternate between extreme close-ups of individuals and extreme long shots of landscapes. As *Taste of Cherry* opens, the 50-ish Mr. Badii (Homayoun Ershadi) is driving a Range Rover slowly through a Teheran morning, looking closely at men gathering on the street for day labor. Clearly, he wants to pick one of them up, although it will be another 20 minutes before we find out why. Were this not an Iranian film, one might suspect that he's a gay man cruising for a hustler. Even though this is an Iranian film, this suspicion, along with more sinister ones, remains quite evident in the reactions of the men he approaches.

Abandoning the city for its desolate outskirts, he finally manages to pick up a shy, extremely nervous young Kurdish soldier (Ali Moradi). The soldier remains uneasy, becoming even more so when Badii finally explains what kind of "job" he's offering six months pay in exchange for. He's driving toward a roadside hole where he intends to commit suicide later that night by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. He wants the soldier to come back at 6am the following morning and check the status of his body. If he's alive, he wants the soldier to help him out of the hole; if he's dead, he wants the soldier to bury him. In response to



Homayoun Ershadi as Mr. Badii

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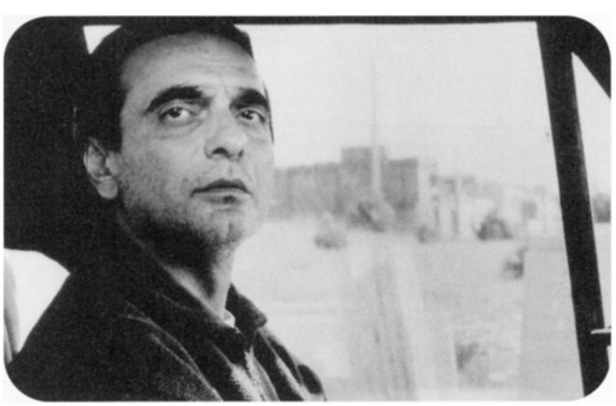


Homayoun Ershadi as Mr. Badii

this proposition, the soldier suddenly bursts out of the car, racing at full speed into the middle of nowhere.

Approaching a deserted construction site, Badii makes small talk with the guard and manages to convince the guard's friend, an Afghani seminary student (Hossein Noori), to go for a ride. When the student hears Badii's request, he smugly quotes the Koran and warns him against committing the sin of suicide. After the two men argue for a while, Badii drives him back to the site. His next passenger is a Turkish taxidermist (Abdolhossein Bagheri), who, as we later find out, works at a natural history museum. Although adamantly opposed to Badii's decision, Bagheri proves the most responsive of the three passengers. He's the only one willing to talk much about his personal life. Indeed, he describes a suicide attempt of his own, which was abandoned only after he ate mulberries and realized that life still had plenty to offer him. He, albeit reluctantly, agrees to help Badii.

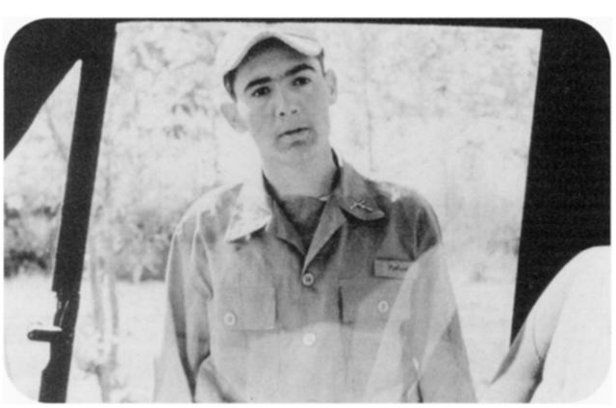
During these sequences, Kiarostami shot each actor separately and edited the footage together in shot/reverse-shot form to create the illusion of passengers sitting across from Badii. In truth, Kiarostami himself sat across from the actor. Additionally, none of the actors except Bagheri and Ershadi met each other. The result of these tactics is a palpable increase in the passengers' level of uncertainty.

Each passenger represents a different age group, as well as a different response to Badii's request. The youngest is the soldier, who appears barely out of his teens; the seminarian appears to be in his 20s, and the taxidermist is an experienced middle-aged man. Together, they represent a sum total of potential responses to a suicidal man's despair: sheer terror and panic, and religious and humanist defenses of life's worth. The force of Kiarostami's conviction seems to lie behind the third one, but all three somehow seem inadequate. Implicitly, the film is also addressed to the spectator, requiring us to fill in or work around the missing information and thus placing us in the passenger's seat.

Several of Kiarostami's screenplays, including *The White Balloon* (directed by Jafar Panahi) and *The Key* (directed by Ebrahim Fourozesh), take place in real time. Although *Taste of Cherry* takes place over the course of about 12 hours, much of it feels like real time because of its relentless focus on Badii's plan. Badii concentrates desperately on his goal of committing suicide, never discussing the reasons behind his despair. The film's sense of character exists entirely in the moment. Does he have a family? He implies that he does, and that they've been hurt by his problems, without actually spelling it out. Where does he work? Is he unemployed? He never mentions these issues. These refusals are brilliant maneuvers on Kiarostami's part, allowing the spectator to read into the enormous, eloquent hollows under Badii's eyes any number of motives that would never make it past the Iranian censors.

Instead of talking about his suicidal feelings, Badii passes over and over through a hellish stretch of industrial debris, abandoned machinery, and brown, dry, or dying vegetation. The land itself looks ready to give up. It's an emblematic use of landscape, worthy of Antonioni or Rossellini (or J.G. Ballard, for that matter)—simultaneously a real landscape and a projection of Badii's mental state. At one point, Bagheri suddenly seems to realize that it may not be particularly effective to evoke the wonders of nature in a desert, and suggests that Badii go out of his way to take a prettier route. He does, and it's the first time we see much greenery.

Described on paper, Bagheri's argument against suicide sounds like a series of simplistic platitudes. Of course, life can get better; of course, the world is full of beauty and possibility. But telling these things to a suicidal man is like telling someone in the middle of



The young Kurdish soldier

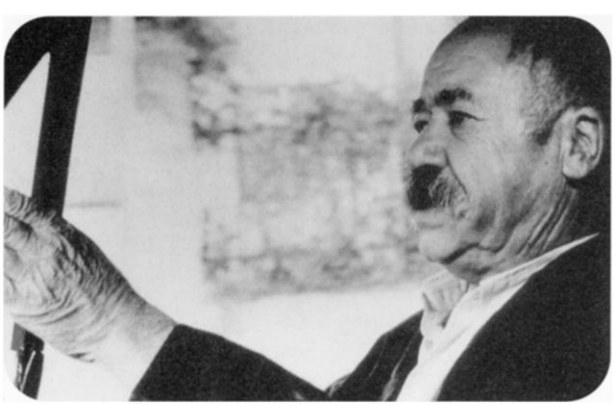
The Afghani seminary student

a panic attack to just relax and stay calm. However, Bagheri's gesture is moving because of what it represents, not because of the wisdom of his words. Unlike the soldier and seminarian, he's willing to go out on a limb and act out of friendship toward a desperate man. To the extent that Badii's motives are readable, his suicidal urges seem to stem mostly from neediness and loneliness. Kiarostami evokes the force of this loneliness by isolating each actor in a close-up. It's an indication of Bagheri's compassion that he and Badii are allowed to appear in the same shot.

Of the five Kiarostami features I've seen, each is structured around a quest whose goal's importance gradually fades as the experience of the quest itself becomes central. *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* both end with final scenes that offer ambiguities rather than a definitive conclusion to the quest. Unless one has seen these films, the ending of *Taste of Cherry* is likely to seem like a bizarre cop-out.

After Badii lies down in the hole, the film fades to black. Then it cuts to a video, apparently shot in spring. The hills are green, with flowers blooming everywhere. The film crew is visible and audible, having just recorded a sound take of soldiers marching. Ershadi lights a cigarette and then hands it to Kiarostami. The soldiers sit down to relax and start picking flowers, as a jazzy funeral march (Louis Armstrong's "St. James Infirmary") begins on the sound track.

The extreme long shots that close *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* both imply a certain measure of distance from the central quest of the narrative. In *And Life Goes On,* a filmmaker (clearly a stand-in for Kiarostami) travels to the earthquake-ravaged region of Koker, where Kiarostami shot *Where Is the Friend's Home?,* to find out if the non-professional child actors who starred in that film are still alive. *Through the Olive Trees* takes place on the set of *And Life Goes On,* in which a young man, Hossein, and a young woman, Tahereh, are cast as a married couple. In real life, he desperately wants to marry her, but she won't even speak to him.



The Turkish taxidermist

These films' abrupt endings open up questions about the real-life events behind the films; they suggest that people are more important than characters and experiences more important than narratives. In a far more extreme fashion, the ending of *Taste of Cherry* opens up a similar set of questions. It's a distancing effect, distracting us from the issue of Badii's suicide by reminding us that we're watching a film, but it wouldn't be particularly remarkable if it stopped there. It's also a new beginning. After involving us in the story of one man's isolation and desperation for 90 minutes, it suddenly shows us some of what was lacking from his life: playfulness, an openness to natural beauty, (possibly) meaningful labor. Additionally, after the rigid formal structure that the film follows for most of its length, the looseness of the hand-held videography comes as a relief and a release. We may never know whether Badii lived or died, but we do realize the richness of the life going on around him (and, implicitly, us). If *Taste of Cherry* itself is a funeral march, this final scene shifts it into a new, slightly more upbeat key and rhythm.

François Truffaut once said that, to him, films were more important than life. Kiarostami, who once boasted that he'd only seen a few dozen films in his life, would be horrified by this statement. All of his work points in the opposite direction: towards an engagement with the richness of the world outside the screen. He may have recently become a "critics' darling," but unlike most of his fans, including Western filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard, Kiarostami isn't a cinephile himself, therefore his explorations never run the risk of getting trapped in a hall of pop-culture-reference mirrors. To a greater or lesser extent, *And Life Goes On, Through the Olive Trees,* and the documentaries *Close Up* and *Homework* all join a suspicion of the image and an awareness of the tremendous power of filmmakers over ordinary people with a belief in the healing power of cinema. In its own, far more oblique fashion, *Taste of Cherry* continues these concerns. While rarely becoming explicitly political, Kiarostami's inquiries touch on one of the central challenges of our time: the responsibilities, possibilities, and dangers of image-making. It's a shame that there's no one making films like his in the United States, where the class differences between image-makers and image-consumers dwarf the ones in Iran.

Steve Erickson is a freelance writer who lives in New York. He has written for *Cineaste, Time Out, New York, Spin,* and the *NYU Film Review.*

Book Reviews

Allegories of Underdevelopment

Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema

By Ismail Xavier. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. $54.95 cloth; $21.95 paper.

In the past two years we have witnessed the publication of an increasing number of monographs on discrete Latin-American cinemas, many treating issues, such as national identity and class representation, currently in vogue throughout the field. Ismail Xavier's *Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema* was one of the most eagerly awaited of these volumes. As a leading scholar of Brazilian cinema, Xavier has published extensively in the past 15 years, in both English and Portuguese. His work is perhaps best known in the U.S. for essays he contributed to Robert Stam and Randal Johnson's anthology on Brazilian cinema and to Manuel Alvarado, John King, and Ana M. López's *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas.* However, his extensive work on Brazilian cinema has been nearly inaccessible to scholars and students who don't speak Portuguese. In the present volume, Xavier's close textual analyses and clear theoretical underpinning prove that *Allegories of Underdevelopment* was worth the wait.

As Xavier explains in his preface (vii), the present book grew out of his dissertation, completed for New York University in 1982. From the dissertation, Xavier has published two books in Portuguese, *Sertão Mar: Glauber Rocha e estética da fome* (1983) and *Alegorias do subdesenvolvimento: Cinema Novo, Tropicalismo, Cinema Marginal* (1993). The publication of *Allegories of Underdevelopment* brings Xavier's cogent theoretical analysis of Brazilian cinema to U.S. audiences in book-length form for the first time. Xavier demonstrates the imbrication of history and politics within Brazilian cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, arguing that the filmmakers of the Cinema Novo represented the transformation of their nation in this period through the use of cinematic allegory, linking it closely with the "aesthetic of hunger" of the early Cinema Novo and with other themes of Brazilian culture.

Xavier examines eight films from 1964 to 1970, all made by filmmakers active in the Cinema Novo movement, all produced for theatrical release, and all dealing with contemporary social issues. They all posit some form of aesthetic alternative to the mainstream cinema. Xavier presents close textual readings of these works, steeped in the theoretical questions of their time, and of the scholarly debates about Cinema Novo in the 70s and 80s. The result is a clear, though dense, explication of the "value and power of allegory as a source of knowledge and as a critical view of history" (6).

Xavier's choice of the six years between 1964 and 1970 situates his argument at the crux of political and artistic changes crucial to Brazil and her cinema. In Xavier's words, these films "express the passage from the promise of happiness to the contemplation of hell that marked their historical moment" (10). In 1964 a military coup ended Brazil's experiment with democracy. Authoritarian rule marked the rest of the decade, intensified by a coup within the coup in 1968. The Cinema Novo films from 1964 to 1968, considered the second phase of the movement, responded to the repressive atmosphere and the reversal of social reforms by analyzing the failure of the left-wing politics they espoused. At the same time, the filmmakers realized that although the early films of the movement had addressed "the popular," attempting to represent the perspective of "the people," they had not been popular in the sense of reaching a wide audience. In response to the coup, Cinema Novo filmmakers concentrated on positioning their social criticism within films that would appeal to the mass audience and would perform at the box office. The 1968 coup brought stronger censorship and harsher repression and filmmakers turned to allegory to express themselves.

Xavier begins with Glauber Rocha, probably the best known of the Cinema Novo directors and the author of "The Aesthetic of Hunger," an essay which presents one of the most important polemics of the movement. Writing in 1965, looking back on the first years of Cinema Novo, Rocha observed that violence is an authentic cultural expression of hungry people and he called for a cinematic style that would articulate the "real" Brazil: her hunger, her discontent, and her lack of hope. Xavier first analyzes Rocha's *Black God, White Devil* (1963–64), a film considered to be the embodiment of the filmmaker's aesthetic theory. Chapter 2 examines Rocha's *Land in Anguish* (1967) and chapter 6, Rocha's *Antônio das Mortes* (1969). The emphasis on Rocha derives from the filmmaker's importance within an evolving cinematic movement and his representation of a nation in flux. Rocha's oeuvre contains within it the very transformation of cinematic style that, according to Xavier, occurred between 1964 and 1970.

Black God, White Devil, Xavier argues, bends history and legend to the will of the mise-en-scène, borrowing from an oral storytelling tradition, part of the popular culture which Cinema Novo celebrates (40). In so doing, the film form stages its ideology, "attuning its style to the adverse economic conditions governing its production, expressing the basic principles of the "aesthetic of hunger" (40). Rocha continues what Xavier calls "his general diagnosis of the country" (81) in *Land in Anguish.* In this later film, the characters are types or allegories for different segments of the population. Xavier sees this film as a "baroque drama" (89) in which neocolonialism, underdevelopment, and repression transform class struggle into "the aggression against good taste in a search for coherence and unity" (89).

The five other films examined in this book dovetail beautifully with the continuum created by Rocha's work from 1963 to 1967. Xavier shows that as Brazil grew more violent, pessimistic, and financially endangered, her filmmakers reacted with thoughtful, critical films. He positions, for example, Júlio Bressane's 1969 *Killed the Family and Went*

to the Movies as an allegory of the Brazilian social crisis, a moment in which a violent crime and moviegoing could have been so dispassionately linked as they are in the film. Calling *Killed the Family* exemplary of Brazilian cinema at the end of the decade, Xavier notes that the film placed moviegoing as an experience in which cinema does not consider itself as a good entertainment exterior to the circle of violence that it observes, but recognizes itself as part of the process, an exercise of the look that carries with it the same problematic of love and death that it focuses on (216).

This notion, that film (and filmmakers) wrote itself into the cycle of violence, rather than simply representing it, illustrates the ingenuity and determination of Brazil's filmmakers in a historical moment that saw modernization, oppression, and a political shift to the right. Through his analyses of these eight films, Xavier convincingly charts the "course in which cinema had to work out its own political crisis," explaining the thematiziation of a "paradigm of failure." Ultimately, Xavier makes clear how Brazilian filmmakers struck a difficult balance between defending and criticizing their nation's path to modernization (262) in films which allegorize the role of the people, the continuing class struggle, and the challenge of recreating a social order.

Ilene S. Goldman is an independent scholar whose articles have appeared in *Jump Cut, Spectator,* and the *Chicago Tribune* as well as in several recent anthologies.

Boom and Bust

Hollywood in the 1940s (History of the American Cinema, volume 6)

By Thomas Schatz. New York: Scribner's Sons Reference, 1997. $75.00. Paperback edition forthcoming from the University of California Press, November, 1999. $22.50.

It may well be that the most significant word in the main title of *Boom and Bust: Hollywood in the 1940s,* Thomas Schatz's valuable addition to Scribner's essential "History of the American Cinema" series, is neither of its nouns, with their suggestion of narratives of rise followed by fall. Rather, it might well be the conjunction that is of greatest import: the "and" that renders 40s history as a simultaneity of boom and bust together. Indeed, Schatz's volume refuses easy narratives of the course of film history and seeks instead for temporal complications, deconstructions of chronological logic.

To be sure, there are definite and definitive temporal markers in the 1940s that one can't ignore. More than other decades perhaps, 40s film history has to be looked at in light of extra-filmic events—in this case, for example, the assertion of inevitable political determinants because of the war and cold-war postwar—that automatically put the lie to the desire to imagine the history of any cultural practice (such as cinema) as a non-eventful *longue durée* autonomous from politics and society. The war makes history; it inevitably makes movie history. In this respect, the main structure of *Boom and Bust* seems at first glance perfectly logical and straightforward: with the war as demarcating event, the book is divided primarily into three chronological slices of prewar, war, postwar.

But each of the three chronological sections adopts a synchronic analytic strategy common to all of them, and it is this shared structuration of the argument across temporal slices that undoes easy chronology. For each of the three periods, there is a first chapter on the overall structure of the film industry (especially in its responses to external events and pressures), followed by a chapter on individual studio operations, followed by a chapter on "Stars, Genres, and Production Trends." Along the way, the book breaks up individual sections with quite useful case studies that examine how larger industry practices worked themselves out in concrete situations. (For example, the section on postwar trends includes discussion of Abbot and Costello, with emphasis on the ways their return to screen success both picks up on and reinvigorates their wartime reputation.) As Schatz explains about the case studies in the book's introduction: "Close study of specific cases reveals the complex interplay of historical forces which affect the making of movies and which ultimately shape individual films. And it is at this level of analysis, finally, that one is most keenly aware of the stakes involved in the practice of film history—that is, an understanding and appreciation of the social impact, cultural value, and lasting appeal of the movies themselves" (7).

It should be noted in passing that individual sections can also include subsections that detail issues specific to this or that chronological slice. For example, the War section has an additional discussion—by Clayton R. Koppes, on the role of the Office of War Information. An additionally noteworthy feature of the volume is that, following the precedent of the previous volume in the series, Tino Balio's *Grand Design, Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939,* many of *Boom and Bust*'s specialized sections have been farmed out by the presiding author to individual expert writers. In addition to Koppes' analysis, there are contributions by Janet Staiger (on the B side of the film industry), Mary Beth Haralovich (on promotion campaigns), Tom Doherty (on documentary and its interplays with fiction film), Chris Anderson (on film and TV relations), and Lauren Rabinowitz (on the avant-garde). (Several of these discussions take place as chapters in a fourth section of the book—after the three chronological ones—on "Ancillary Developments.")

The sharing of overall analytic approach by the three diverse chronologically oriented sections has as its consequence that *Boom and Bust* pinpoints continuities as much as change. In particular, where the standard view of 40s film history has it that bust comes only in the postwar moment (as in the common reference to a sudden, drastic falling-off of box office somewhere magically in 1946 or 1947), Schatz uses careful archival work to show how the problems of Hollywood's box office had a long, complicated gestation. Focusing in his

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earliest pages on prewar pressures on the film industry—most particularly, the initiation in the 1930s of antitrust actions against the big studios—Schatz shows that the seeds of crisis for Hollywood run through the 1940s. Conversely, he will also suggest that some of the more promising developments that we assume came about only in the postwar moment had their anticipations earlier. Here, for instance, Schatz's precise research revises the common impression that independent fiction film production was a relatively late phenomenon; in his analysis, the impetus for independence occurred early on in the 1940s and the postwar moment figures its fragility, rather than its flowering. Ultimately, Schatz's concern to blur demarcations of before/after lead to a rethinking of the war itself as decisive break. As Schatz puts it, "[T]hus the governing paradox of the era: the closer one looks at the film industry during the 1940s, the more evident it becomes that World War II marked an extended, dramatic, and most welcome *interval* in a decade-long period of industry decline" (2; my emphasis).

All this is to say that, even as *Boom and Bust* follows the primary goal of other volumes in the Scribner's series in offering encyclopedically a summa of what it seems possible to know positively about the functionings of American film across the decades, this volume—like the others, indeed—also shows that the best positive history is one that also makes an argument about the course of history.

To be sure, all the Scribner's volumes are perfect as research tools, compendiums of facts and figures that one can dip in and out of at will. The tripartite structure that Schatz adopts for each chronological slice in *Boom and Bust* is particularly rewarding in this respect: for instance, the discussion of production trends marvelously pinpoints the vagaries of genre and cycle throughout 40s Hollywood history. *Boom and Bust* certainly constitutes an essential background for anyone interested in this complicated decade. But, like the other volumes, *Boom and Bust* also has a story to tell about its period, a take on its history. By dealing with break and continuity together, Schatz is able in fact to tell several histories of American film: the history of the cinema's recruitment by politics, but also the history of industrial practices that move at their own irreducible speed.

Each volume in the Scribner's "History of American Cinema" project has been awaited with great expectation, and each volume has fulfilled its promise. Now that more than half of the series has appeared, it is obvious indeed that the volumes are a great contribution to the rigorous study of American film. In fact, in many ways, they have come to constitute the very standards and the very terms for that study.

Dana Polan teaches in the Division of Critical Studies in the School of Cinema-TV at the University of Southern California.

Looking for the Other

Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze

By E. Ann Kaplan. New York: Routledge, 1997. $17.95.

In its breadth and eclecticism, E. Ann Kaplan's most recent book continues in the tradition of her earlier works such as *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* and *Women and Film.* Kaplan brings her erudition and enthusiasm to what she calls "inter-gender and inter-racial looking-relations in the context of films about travel" (xi). In exploring such looking-relations, Kaplan pursues several lines of inquiry. She investigates a diverse body of films in the light of a daunting amount of theoretical work about cinema, culture, and history. She responds to the charge that feminist film theory of the 1970s and 1980s overlooked race in its gender analysis, and she brings psychoanalytic theory to bear on selected texts to reveal the "prevalence of the male gaze across cultures" (xii). Finally, she examines women's films that involve traveling between cultures. However, neither these motifs nor others in the book are truly focused into a single argument. Kaplan's acknowledgments reveal that the book is the result of multiple seminars given in the United States and abroad, and therein may lie the cause of this lack of focus.

Looking for the Other is divided into two sections, entitled "Background: Theories of Nation, Psychoanalysis and the Imperial Gaze" and "Travelling Postcolonialists and Women of Color." The first part surveys what Kaplan rather cryptically describes as "Hollywood's modernist fascination with white male and female explorers and entrepreneurs, as well as with British colonialism, in the context of theories of America as nation" (15). Included in this broad field are issues of American slavery, films about colonial travel from the 1930s to the present, and the use of psychoanalysis by Hollywood to normalize race. The second part of the book, which is more successfully focused than the first, is intended to be a study of six women directors who are preoccupied with travel and what Kaplan calls travelling cultures.

The book begins with a telling disclaimer. After the author describes her work as "situated at the interface of literary-style textual analysis, film studies, women's studies and post-colonial theory" (xii), she explains that "aspects of each discipline will have to be subordinated to themes that cut across the disciplines" (xiii). What this seems to mean in practice is that thorough explanation and argument will be replaced by citation, listing, and personal ruminations that are often disconnected from one another to a striking degree. For the most part, the book elaborates what seem to be Kaplan's thought processes at the expense of any specific thesis.

Kaplan claims that this book offers a study of texts "within issues to do with feminism, imperialism, nation, ethnicity" with a feminist slant that involves "an interest in subjectivity, interiority, relatedness" (xiv). *Looking for the Other* is based on the distinction between the "look,"

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which connotes a process, relationships, and curiosity, and the negative "gaze," which is a one-way event that denies the agency of the perceived object. The analogy between the male gaze as first described by Laura Mulvey in the 1970s and the imperial gaze as described by Robert Stam and Louise Spence in the 1980s is one of several starting points for the book. This particular path leads to the conclusion that "white subjectivities . . . can also be destabilized when exposed to the gaze of the Other, since this is a gaze to which such subjects have not traditionally been subjected" (xix). Kaplan does not fail to credit the work of Stam and Ella Shohat in *Unthinking Eurocentrism.* However, her attempt to differentiate her work by claiming a feminist and psychoanalytic focus on independent women's cinema that reveals the often ignored woman's point of view in postcolonial studies is not convincing.

What is absent from the book are any original questions or pointed issues to which the filmic analyses might usefully respond. For example, the introductory chapter, "Travel, Travelling Identities and the Look," and the next, "Theories of Nation and Hollywood in the Contexts of Gender and Race," briefly light on often random ideas/quotations from, among others, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Gayatri Spivak, Michel Foucault, James Clifford, Teresa de Lauretis, W.E.B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, Kobena Mercer, Carrie Mae Weems, Arjun Appadurai, Toni Morrison, Jean Baudrillard, Arthur Kroker, Walker Connor, Anne McClintock, Homi Bhabha, Benedict Anderson, John Tomlinson, Anthony Giddens, Etienne Balibar, and Chandra Mohanty. I note all these names to indicate the impossible scope of the book and the author's reliance on the ideas of others in place of an original thesis. Moreover, this wealth of theoretical material is not integrated with the discussion of the films, so that the first half of the book continually points to what will be done later, while the second section is weighted with references to what has already been said. This lack of cohesion points to the book's origin as a collection of essays rather than a concerted investigation of a focussed thesis.

Early in the first section of the book, Kaplan turns to "select past and current theories and practices of nation" (28, my italics) and their relation to Hollywood depictions of gender and race. The chaotic and superficial survey ranges from blaming McCarthyism for the absence of Fanon in the American classroom to chastising the early-twentieth-century essayist Randolph Bourne for his "glaring blind spots" in regard to slavery (38). The reader's continual confusion over whether the actual focus of the book is a review of theory or an analysis of film reaches its apotheosis when the 1942 film *Cat People* and the real event of California's anti-immigrant Proposition 187 of 1995 are discussed as equivalent signs of nation-building moments of crisis (33). This conflation of vastly different orders of things continues throughout the book. One of the more egregious examples of the lack of focus and rigor is the second chapter, which examines the links between science and colonialism as seen in Hollywood films. The reader is bombarded with bits of information that range from the commonplace to the absurd. After endowing the Puritans with the "mental apparatus that goes with empire building" (60), Kaplan discusses colonialists and cameras, the early work of Freud, *The Song of Ceylon,* the feminine masquerade, *The Birth of a Nation,* movies about apes, Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever,* movies about Asian women, *The Air Up There* of 1994 (with Kevin Bacon), and, finally, a brief analysis of *Black Narcissus* and *Out of Africa.* The complete anachrony and often ridiculous conclusions (such as the claim that Americans are fascinated by gorillas, on the basis of three Hollywood films) obscure the often interesting analysis of the films themselves.

The second half of the book examines films made by women from Britain, France, China, Japan, and the United States. Kaplan admits that the selection is eclectic but believes that each filmmaker is concerned with resisting male and imperial gazes. The films of Julie Dash, Claire Denis, Pratibha Parmar, Hu Mei, Yvonne Rainer, Allison Anders, and Trinh T. Minh-ha are studied as critiques of Hollywood that employ formal experimentation and imaginative imagery to reverse the gaze. The central chapter, "Can One Know the Other?," argues (with characteristic vagueness and an unenlightening extra-textual reference to Jean-François Lyotard) that female filmmakers reframe the questions typically imposed by males so that, as Kaplan writes, "female bodily ways of knowing might illuminate the question of the *différend*" (17). As noted, Kaplan's analyses of the films are often interesting and productive. However, by drowning her straightforward work in the context of, for example, the "1986 Jameson-Ahmad debate" (138), the concrete readings are obfuscated. Rarely does the theoretical baggage either come across clearly in itself or relate to the film under discussion. If the reader is already familiar with the outside work, she does not need to reread it; if the reader is not, she will be completely baffled by Kaplan's collage of quotations and references. Moreover, while the analyses of accessible films such as Denis's *Chocolat* or Dash's *Illusions* are extensive, the work on intriguing and more complex films, such as Pratibha and Walker's *Warrior Marks* or Trinh's *Shoot for the Contents,* are often left incomplete. Chapters tend to end with either a series of questions or the observation that the subject needs further work. Quite simply, the seldom-seen films ostensibly under discussion in the book would be served far better if Kaplan had concentrated on them rather than skimming the well-known surfaces of postcolonial and feminist theory.

As a series of lectures, the readings display a passionately involved, informed scholar of film working on a series of theoretical problems. But as a book, *Looking for the Other* is rambling and disjointed. The publisher of this material should be reprimanded for the disservice it has done to the author in failing to edit her ideas into a cohesive and more useful study.

Robin Blaetz is an assistant professor in the Film Studies Program at Emory University.

Masked Men

Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties

By Steven Cohan. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997. $39.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

From gray flannel suits to full drag, from Cary Grant and Gregory Peck to Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis, Steven Cohan's *Masked Men* shows indeed that clothes make the man, to the extent that clothing comprises an aspect of masculine performance. Through extremely detailed yet exceptionally lucid discussions of dozens of films, Cohan brilliantly examines the failure of cinematic representation to stabilize "masculinity" in the 50s (i.e., the period from the end of World War II to the election of John Kennedy) while nevertheless bolstering a hegemonic masculinity of heterosexual manliness. With care and thoroughness, Cohan scrutinizes a richly apt variety of sources—fan magazines, promotional material, newspaper reviews, posters, popular journals, star biographies, film theory, and film criticism—to articulate the intersections of narrative and image, publicity and performance, gender and genre, popular media and national agenda that circumscribe cultural definitions.

Masked Men perceptively details the extensive process through which 50s Hollywood created a normative man: the middle-class, heterosexual breadwinner who could convert the homosocial energies and martial impulses produced by military service into the homogeneous performance of leading man in the American nuclear family. This process Cohan regards as a form of masquerade so that the book's title, Cohan explains, "summarizes the gendered *and* sexualized masquerades underlying the performative dimensions of masculinity in the movies" (xvi). Especially because Hollywood depends upon "making the sexually differentiated bodies of stars visible to an audience" (xvi), films foreground the performativity of gender, and hence the conflicted components out of which norms are forged.

In this context, Cohan's first masked man is the composite of Cary Grant, Roger Thornhill (whom Grant portrays in *North by Northwest*), and George Kaplan (whom Thornhill portrays in *North by Northwest*). Though a nuanced reading of Thornhill's relationship to the women in his life—his mother, to whom he is always attempting an impossible return, and Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint), after whom he is in equally impossible pursuit—Cohan demonstrates that Thornhill/Grant participates in a crisis of masculine identity, of dislocation and disorientation, for which the nonexistent George Kaplan serves as both the appropriate icon and, in the faked end to his artificial life, the perfect cover. The truth about Thornhill, in other words, is that his identity—like Kaplan's, a fabrication of addresses, toiletries and clothing—is found in the closet and signified by the gray tailored suit connecting him, in all his incarnations, to the 50s representative man, the middle-class executive.

From Roger Thornhill, who ends the decade hanging precariously from Mount Rushmore and in a split second almost as precariously atop a conjugal berth, Cohan looks at the booming peace-time economy's relationship to the image of masculinity consistent with the impression of America as "a socially unified nation, populated by an ever-growing, ever-affluent middle class of average Americans" (56). At the same time, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *The Seven Year Itch,* among others, indicate the "eviscerated manhood" (56) of the breadwinner who came to personify the national character, so that the same culture that saw any deviation from normative domesticity as emasculinization, "also worried that domesticity itself had resulted in . . . the decline of the white middle-class American male" (56). The difficult transfer from the martial codes of masculinity to the codes of postwar domesticity created a disruptive thematic thread, worrying the culture's understanding of masculinity: if masculinity were not performative, then it would have been essentially ill-suited for the needs of postwar America, and if it were, it might have lacked the essential consistency needed to anchor the image of American domesticity considered of crucial strategic importance in the Cold War. Thus, when the gray flannel suit comes off, revealing the fetishized male chest—whether in such films as *Picnic, Streetcar Named Desire,* the Steve Reeves Hercules films, or the Biblical epics—the attempt to ground masculinity in a definitive male body only converted the physical representation into a form of performance, as signaled equally, for instance, by the shaving of chest hair, by cinematic framing, or by publicity stills and poster art that attempt to inscribe masculinity onto the body of the star even when the narratives mark that body as the site of sexual failure. Nor does there emerge a cogent counterimage out of potentially different 50s representations of masculinity, whether at one extreme in the form of the tough guy or at the other in the form of the sensitive young man. In an array of postwar Bogart films, for example, the erotic site of definitive manliness which the narrative can never adequately supply arises instead through negations and supplements: the erotic other of *Dead Reckoning* is the dead war buddy who invests the film's sexual triangulations with their motivating desire, recuperated as forms of mirroring and loss. "The homosocial organization of Bogart's persona," Cohan demonstrates, is subsequently "made a symptom of male sexual dysfunction in *In a Lonely Place* and pathologized as the deviant psychology of a criminal type in *The Desperate Hours*" (121). On the other hand, Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, or James Dean mark a new generation of male stars with a bisexual or homoerotic tendency. They are read, however, Cohan convincingly argues, as "boys," so that the disruptive difference of their sexuality becomes the proto-form of normative 50s masculinity. Thus, Cohan argues, "in the eroticized star personae of Clift and Brando, the 'passing' boy of fifties films calls to mind the comparable figure of the transvestite" (259).

This sense of the transvestite brings the argument full circle. Completing the thematic link between the "boy" and the gray flannel suit, it allows an insightful discussion of

Rock Hudson, a figure who embodied all the contradictions that 50s hegemonic masculinity attempted to suppress. Merging sensitive boy and man in the gray-suited, upper-middle-class executive and undomesticated bachelor, Hudson, a man with a big chest, played the role of Western tough guy as well as that of urban sophisticate. Reading this quintessence of 50s masculinity through *Pillow Talk,* through *Playboy Magazine,* and through promotional material that helped construct Hudson's star persona, Cohan shows how that persona was always a function of the homosexual closet that bachelorhood, on and off screen, encoded. The split role that Hudson plays in *Pillow Talk,* like the two bedrooms in the film's *Playboy*-style bachelor pad, create a duality that makes visible the performative quality of Hudson's masculinity. Thus his performance of masculinity, Cohan demonstrates, derived its capacity to fulfill the proscriptions of the cold war agenda from the muted visibility of homosexuality.

In articulating this pervasive tension between hegemony and visibility, however, Cohan does not draw as fully as he might on the extant work examining the broader cultural manifestations of the narratives of masculinity with which he deals. He also fails to make important political connections that explain more fully how the factors involved in 50s masculinity were not just effects of but also elements in the national narrative. And he does not fully articulate the relationship of his argument to the pervasive representation of destructive or castrating women in 50s films.

If *Masked Men* falls slightly short in those respects, it nevertheless provides a stunning, important, and very entertaining addition to American film studies, to Cold War studies, and to gender studies. An exemplary piece of cultural criticism, it helps us construct a sharper, more complete understanding of the fabric of assumptions and tenets of cultural production that circumscribe the performance of "masculinity" at a specific historical moment.

Alan Nadel's latest book is *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America.*

Nationalising Femininity

Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War.

Edited by Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson.
New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. $79.95.

Several decades have fortunately elapsed since that notorious 1962 dismissal of British Cinema by *Movie*'s Oxbridge critics. On both sides of the Atlantic several studies have appeared, making British Cinema no longer "The Unknown Cinema" of Alan Lovell's original BFI seminar paper delivered nearly 30 years ago. This collection contains further scholarly examinations of a once undefinable national cinema. Edited by two major authorities in this area, it contains articles by both new and well-known names in British studies (the latter group encompasses Antonia Lant, Penny Summerfield, Annette Kuhn, Sue Harper, Pat Kirkham, and Christine Geraghty). *Nationalising Femininity* promises much. On the whole it delivers.

After an editorial introduction emphasizing the crucial necessity of viewing cinematic representations against relevant contemporary cultural discourses as well as the often neglected pre- and postwar years, the work moves to Antonia Lant's key prologue on "mobile femininity." Lant sets the tone for many of the subsequent essays in showing how such factors influenced cinematic representations containing both stabilizing and destabilizing features. Her admirable essay supports editorial warnings concerning the dangers of viewing cinematic texts in isolation from determining social contexts. The three parts of *Nationalising Femininity* contribute to this project in various ways.

Part One, on wartime mobile women, contains Penny Summerfield's well-researched essay on wartime occupational discourses affecting women, Alison Oram's survey of wartime female political activism, Gillian Swanson's article on war's emotional toll on morale and sexuality, and Carol Smart's scholarly survey of marriage and divorce from 1937 to 1951. This last stimulating essay examines little-known forces affecting Laura Jesson in *Brief Encounter* (1945), making Lean's film less comically archaic and more related to its important social context.

Part Two contains various essays focusing on cultural practices and representations. Three contributions are competent explorations: Janice Winship's essay on women's magazines, Rosalind Brunt's article on newsreel representations of the Royal Family during 1936 to 1945, and Pat Kirkham's exploration of wartime costume and feminine appearance. However, two essays are rather disappointing: both Joy Leman's examination of wartime class and gender issues in British radio and Delia Jarrett-Macauley's survey of female West Indian challenge to British national identity really need more detailed exploration.

Part Three represents the real cornerstone of the entire collection. It contains seven interesting essays on British cinema's relationship to the whole issue of nationalizing femininity. The section opens with Annette Kuhn's insights into the significant contribution made by 1930s cinematic culture and femininity to the following decade. Like Alison Light's *Forever England* (1991), Kuhn's essay suggests important avenues for future research into this neglected but highly relevant decade's relationship to later cinematic practices. Sue Harper's characteristically meticulous archivist explorations into the cinema of total war contribute fresh insights into well-known films by the Archers as well as others, such as *Great Day* (1945)—described as a "masterpiece, which combines radical sexual politics with a ravishing visual style" (209). Janet Thumim and Melinda Mash contribute significant essays relating various films to significant wartime and postwar context. Thumim considers the changing social nature of female audience reactions to films such as *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), *The Man in Grey* (1943), and *Odette* (1950). Mash examines the conflicting forces of affluence and austerity in two postwar films, *Dance Hall* (1950) and *Turn the Key Softly.*

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However, this is a subject that calls for detailed consideration of more examples.

The three key essays in Part Three are those by Christine Gledhill, Christine Geraghty, and Tessa Perkins. Although dealing with different topics, they all argue against the blanket acceptance of, as Gledhill puts it, the "transgressive" nature of Gainsborough melodramas. They suggest a more complex examination of these films against relevant cultural and historical discourses. As does her welcome reexaminations of once-canonical "articles of faith" in cinema studies, Gledhill's essay on documentary, melodrama, and romance takes issue with the supposedly transgressive qualities of Gainsborough melodrama, suggesting that "despite the efforts of the intelligentsia to maintain a distinction, the relationship between the home front films and Gainsborough melodrama is closer than might first appear" (214). Apparently separate cinematic discourses such as documentary, melodrama, and romance are more related than they appear at first sight, especially in terms of "the negotiation of aesthetic and class codes" (215). Geraghty's essay on the negotiation of nationality and femininity in *Went the Day Well?* (1942), *The Silver Fleet,* and *The Yellow Canary* (both 1943) supports Gledhill's observations on the complex way in which wartime films acknowledged and then reworked female experiences. Finally, Tessa Perkins concludes the anthology appropriately with her insights into how various films, among them *The Wicked Lady, The Seventh Veil* (both 1945), *The Lovers of Joanna Godden* (1947), and *The Red Shoes* (1948), indirectly deal with issues concerning male as well as female postwar adjustment problems.

Nationalising Femininity is a worthy anthology suggesting new areas of study and as well as reconsiderations of recent approaches to a national cinema once believed insignificant and devoid of academic interest.

Tony Williams teaches in the English Department at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

The Passion of David Lynch

Wild at Heart in Hollywood

By Martha P. Nochimson. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998. $40.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Early in her overview of David Lynch's work, Martha Nochimson forecasts the main direction of her commentary, as she notes that "letting go is the form and substance of the Lynch narrative" (11). That notion of "letting go" is a key one for this book, referring not only to what Nochimson sees as the filmmaker's central concern but also to both what the author herself had to do after she began her investigation and what many readers might have to do in order to fully appreciate her book's significance. As Nochimson offers, after starting into a series of interviews with Lynch and revisiting all of his work, she found she had to discard her tendency to see him as but one of a number of postmodern cinematic figures obsessessed with "the labyrinthine self-referentiality of narrative" (2), to put aside her preconceived notions about gender representation in his films, and to let go too of a tendency to read his works in a context of conventional realist representation. Since that letting-go of preconceptions allowed her to understand and, in her own words, be "moved by" what Lynch is up to, she also found "great pleasure here" (194). Significantly, it is a great pleasure that Nochimson generally helps her readers to feel as well.

Yet readers of *The Passion of David Lynch* must also be ready to let go to some extent, for this study does rattle a few critical cages. This book is, of course, an auteur study, and the author, as we have all heard, is quite dead, auteur studies outmoded. However, Nochimson convincingly manages to resuscitate both figure and practice in her work on Lynch, even drawing heavily on what some would dismiss as unreliable information—the director's own comments on his films, television work, and painting. And in carefully constructing her reading of Lynch's films, she often finds her views at odds with what many contemporary critics have offered. For example, in responding to Fredric Jameson's Marxist reading of Lynch, which treats his work as parodistic in intent, Nochimson notes that it is "exceptionally misdirected" and replies to Jameson's frustration at not finding "some civic concern on Lynch's part" by asking her readers, "What is to be said about such a reduced concept of ethics?" (235). While she also goes against critical fashion in her repeated references to Lynch's narratives as "organic" narrative and their ability to tap the "collective unconscious," Nochimson is hardly trying to turn back the clock on film criticism. Rather, she seems to be following Lynch's own lead, particularly his call for making oneself open and receptive, in this instance to a variety of critical stances, in order to grasp the reality of the subject at hand. Thus, Nochimson deftly deploys a mixture of feminist criticism, the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque, and an intriguing blend of Jungian and Freudian concepts (Lynch, she says, often speaks of the "collective *sub*conscious") to make one of our most complex filmmakers seem quite accessible after all.

Nochimson begins her critical task in a rather conventional yet ultimately necessary way, by filling in the little-known background on Lynch, laying out the various career steps that have led up to his feature films and the popular television series *Twin Peaks.* Particularly, she takes us back to his work as a young art student and explores his acknowledged indebtedness to the painters Robert Henri, Francis Bacon, Jackson Pollock, and Edward Hopper. From them, she suggests, he learned not only how to compose his frame but, more importantly, how to use images in order to "tell stories in the special way that we have come to associate with him" (16). That special way involves drawing on the subconscious power of images and then employing them in a narrative framework which challenges yet still manages to fit within the confines of Hollywood filmmaking. It is an approach to narrative that Nochimson likens to the work of Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock, and whose development she traces through Lynch's student films—*Six Men Getting Sick* (1967), *The Alphabet* (1967), and *The Grandmother*

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(1970)—his own photography and painting, and his videotaped performance piece *Industrial Symphony No. 1: The Dream of the Broken Hearted* (1989). She then effectively brings this perspective to bear on his various features and television work, including the film that first established his cult status, *Eraserhead* (1970), and the re-released *Twin Peaks* episodes with added prologues. Simply bringing together this varied work, much of it generally inaccessible, and combining it with Lynch's own comments on his early development as an artist and filmmaker make this book a valuable addition to our studies of contemporary film and filmmakers.

The Passion of David Lynch, though, is ultimately less about narrative style and development than about "passion," that is, about what moves this filmmaker and moves powerfully through all of his films. Nochimson suggests that Lynch tries "to make film narrative a subconscious bridge to real perceptions of life" (13)—perceptions that we are typically blinded to or lured away from by the very nature of modern culture. The common lessons of that culture, she says, are ones of force, control, willfulness, and violence, all elements usually emphasized in Hollywood narrative and fundamental to its typical vision "of the hero as one who takes control by means of violent domination strategies" (11). She illustrates how Lynch's work, often focusing on "seeker/protagonists" such as the amateur detective Jeffrey of *Blue Velvet* and FBI agent Dale Cooper of *Twin Peaks,* opens onto the possibility of another set of values, ones involving receptivity, passivity, and "much that is associated with women's wisdom" (13). In fact, by demonstrating how Lynch's characters find knowledge by abandoning willfulness or achieve a level of wholeness by coming to accept what the culture might deem feminine characteristics, Nochimson effectively counters charges that his work at times seems misogynistic. And while admitting that, despite the critical and popular successes of such works as *The Elephant Man, Blue Velvet,* and *Twin Peaks,* Lynch's sense of the "real world has not achieved full integration with the popular idiom" (204), she argues convincingly for the way "the truth of the dream" (17) in his films speaks to us.

While Nochimson's book deserves high praise for both its critical courage and its consistent insights, it is not without its faults—and irritations for the reader. Too much of the extant criticism, such as David Lavery's fine collection of essays on *Twin Peaks* and Kenneth Kaleta's study of Lynch, receives little more than bibliographic citation. And at times Nochimson belabors her points and, less often, seems as opaque as much of Lynch's work has been described. The former problem follows from the author's tendency to offer far too much plot summary and repetitive commentary. However, while this approach proves a bit irritating, it is certainly useful for those who are unfamiliar with the director's films and it has further justification in her desire to suggest the extent to which all of these creations, including Lynch's generally inaccessible student films, work through the same essential themes and in fundamentally similar ways. The book is also a bit given to ponderous rhetoric, something that a good copyediting should have cleared up. Certainly, Nochimson's description of a scene in *Wild at Heart,* in which she says that "Juana's masturbatory sexual gratification as Reggie pulls the trigger of the gun pointing at Johnnie—and the spectator—is the film's palpably sickening rejection of the uselessness and depravity of the coercive pseudoerotics of the will-to-control" (61-62), manages less to clear up the mysteries of this narrative than to plunge us into the author's own mysterious "Red Room" of interpretation. Yet happily, *The Passion of David Lynch* is very seldom jargon-laden in the manner of so much contemporary criticism, and convoluted comments such as the one cited above are not the norm for a text that never flinches from facing the most difficult of material.

And that unflinching gaze, the determination to take readers into the passion of Lynch's work, is the real payoff of this study. If Nochimson a bit obviously overstates her case at times—asserting, for example, that "David Lynch has changed Hollywood" (199)—she nevertheless makes a good case for his status as one of the most original and important voices in Hollywood, in fact, for his almost singular ability to wed a highly symbolic and idiosyncratic vision with some semblance of the transparent realism American audiences expect from Hollywood narratives. Her book seems a genuine work of passion itself, one that, in helping us recognize what she terms "the humanizing potential of popular culture" (45) as embodied in Lynch's films, serves both its readers and its subject quite well.

J.P. Telotte teaches at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Storage Guide for Color Photographic Materials

By James M. Reilly. Albany, NY: University of the State of New York, 1998. $20.00.

Color fading is one of the most heartbreaking signs of the impermanence of the motion picture medium. Few things in cinema are sadder than a once-glorious color film turned monochromatic pink or red. As color goes, contrast too is lost, and the degraded images that result are not even fugitive cousins of their original state.

In the early 80s, Eastman Kodak developed low-fade stocks with more stable dyes, but pre-80s chromogenic color films are all subject to rather rapid fading. Chromogenic films are those whose color dyes are formed in the print during processing, and these comprise the vast majority of color print and motion picture materials. Given the problem of color fading, the issue faced by archivists, librarians, film collectors, and everyday consumers is how to slow this inevitable process. An essential reference source in the battle against color fading is now available.

James M. Reilly's *Storage Guide* is an invaluable resource for the preservation and collection community as well as for anyone with color picture material, like old photos or home movies, who wishes to extend its color life. This handy, 48-page guide explains in clear terms the chemical alterations that trigger fading, the environmental condi-

(1970)—his own photography and painting, and his videotaped performance piece *Industrial Symphony No. 1: The Dream of the Broken Hearted* (1989). She then effectively brings this perspective to bear on his various features and television work, including the film that first established his cult status, *Eraserhead* (1970), and the re-released *Twin Peaks* episodes with added prologues. Simply bringing together this varied work, much of it generally inaccessible, and combining it with Lynch's own comments on his early development as an artist and filmmaker make this book a valuable addition to our studies of contemporary film and filmmakers.

The Passion of David Lynch, though, is ultimately less about narrative style and development than about "passion," that is, about what moves this filmmaker and moves powerfully through all of his films. Nochimson suggests that Lynch tries "to make film narrative a subconscious bridge to real perceptions of life" (13)—perceptions that we are typically blinded to or lured away from by the very nature of modern culture. The common lessons of that culture, she says, are ones of force, control, willfulness, and violence, all elements usually emphasized in Hollywood narrative and fundamental to its typical vision "of the hero as one who takes control by means of violent domination strategies" (11). She illustrates how Lynch's work, often focusing on "seeker/protagonists" such as the amateur detective Jeffrey of *Blue Velvet* and FBI agent Dale Cooper of *Twin Peaks,* opens onto the possibility of another set of values, ones involving receptivity, passivity, and "much that is associated with women's wisdom" (13). In fact, by demonstrating how Lynch's characters find knowledge by abandoning willfulness or achieve a level of wholeness by coming to accept what the culture might deem feminine characteristics, Nochimson effectively counters charges that his work at times seems misogynistic. And while admitting that, despite the critical and popular successes of such works as *The Elephant Man, Blue Velvet,* and *Twin Peaks,* Lynch's sense of the "real world has not achieved full integration with the popular idiom" (204), she argues convincingly for the way "the truth of the dream" (17) in his films speaks to us.

While Nochimson's book deserves high praise for both its critical courage and its consistent insights, it is not without its faults—and irritations for the reader. Too much of the extant criticism, such as David Lavery's fine collection of essays on *Twin Peaks* and Kenneth Kaleta's study of Lynch, receives little more than bibliographic citation. And at times Nochimson belabors her points and, less often, seems as opaque as much of Lynch's work has been described. The former problem follows from the author's tendency to offer far too much plot summary and repetitive commentary. However, while this approach proves a bit irritating, it is certainly useful for those who are unfamiliar with the director's films and it has further justification in her desire to suggest the extent to which all of these creations, including Lynch's generally inaccessible student films, work through the same essential themes and in fundamentally similar ways. The book is also a bit given to ponderous rhetoric, something that a good copyediting should have cleared up. Certainly, Nochimson's description of a scene in *Wild at Heart,* in which she says that "Juana's masturbatory sexual gratification as Reggie pulls the trigger of the gun pointing at Johnnie—and the spectator—is the film's palpably sickening rejection of the uselessness and depravity of the coercive pseudoerotics of the will-to-control" (61-62), manages less to clear up the mysteries of this narrative than to plunge us into the author's own mysterious "Red Room" of interpretation. Yet happily, *The Passion of David Lynch* is very seldom jargon-laden in the manner of so much contemporary criticism, and convoluted comments such as the one cited above are not the norm for a text that never flinches from facing the most difficult of material.

And that unflinching gaze, the determination to take readers into the passion of Lynch's work, is the real payoff of this study. If Nochimson a bit obviously overstates her case at times—asserting, for example, that "David Lynch has changed Hollywood" (199)—she nevertheless makes a good case for his status as one of the most original and important voices in Hollywood, in fact, for his almost singular ability to wed a highly symbolic and idiosyncratic vision with some semblance of the transparent realism American audiences expect from Hollywood narratives. Her book seems a genuine work of passion itself, one that, in helping us recognize what she terms "the humanizing potential of popular culture" (45) as embodied in Lynch's films, serves both its readers and its subject quite well.

J.P. Telotte teaches at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Storage Guide for Color Photographic Materials

By James M. Reilly. Albany, NY: University of the State of New York, 1998. $20.00.

Color fading is one of the most heartbreaking signs of the impermanence of the motion picture medium. Few things in cinema are sadder than a once-glorious color film turned monochromatic pink or red. As color goes, contrast too is lost, and the degraded images that result are not even fugitive cousins of their original state.

In the early 80s, Eastman Kodak developed low-fade stocks with more stable dyes, but pre-80s chromogenic color films are all subject to rather rapid fading. Chromogenic films are those whose color dyes are formed in the print during processing, and these comprise the vast majority of color print and motion picture materials. Given the problem of color fading, the issue faced by archivists, librarians, film collectors, and everyday consumers is how to slow this inevitable process. An essential reference source in the battle against color fading is now available.

James M. Reilly's *Storage Guide* is an invaluable resource for the preservation and collection community as well as for anyone with color picture material, like old photos or home movies, who wishes to extend its color life. This handy, 48-page guide explains in clear terms the chemical alterations that trigger fading, the environmental condi-

tions (heat, relative humidity, and air pollutants) that produce these chemical changes, and methods of cold storage that retard fading.

Reilly works for the Image Permanence Institute (IPI), which is jointly sponsored by the Society for Imaging Science and Technology and the Rochester Institute of Technology. The information presented in the guide stems from one of the most extensive accelerated-aging studies ever conducted, examining the effects of storage conditions and relative humidity (RH) on dye fading. Conducted from 1993 to 1996 by IPI, the study utilized hundreds of samples of four categories of color picture material: color negative film, color slide film, color print material, and color motion-picture release print film. The materials were subjected to a variety of temperature and RH conditions, and the sample size was large enough to permit the extraction of statistically valid measurements of the factors that produce dye loss.

Color fading will occur inevitably for chromogenic materials, whether they are kept in the dark or exposed to the light. Reilly explains the differences between dark fading (dye loss during periods that films sit in storage under dark conditions) and light fading (dye loss resulting from light exposure when the film is in use) and the factors that produce each condition. The most important factors producing dark fading are heat (any temperature above absolute zero produces the molecular movement that can trigger dye loss) and relative humidity. High rates of the latter cause film to absorb excess amounts of moisture and produce a range of nightmare conditions beyond dye fading. These include liquefaction of the gelatin emulsion layer and a deterioration of the base that results in acetic acid excretion (known as "vinegar syndrome").

Cold storage under conditions of controlled humidity is the only way to retard dye loss and avoid these other problems. But how cold and how humid? To pose the question in an alternative way, what are the effects of given temperatures and humidities upon the color life of a film? The best feature of this guide, beyond even its careful and clear advice on the chemistry of fading and storage environments, is the manner in which it has organized the results of IPI's accelerated-aging studies. These results enabled IPI to quantify the relations between temperature, humidity, and dye fading. Summarizing these relations, the *Storage Guide* shows the user the life expectancy of color materials under a variety of storage conditions.

The guide offers these data in a wheel format. Included with the guide, the data wheel is essentially a circular slide rule that enables the user to plot temperature and humidity so as to determine the approximate time to significant dye fading (defined as 30 percent dye loss, the point at which it becomes visible to the viewer). Most people store their color photographs and home movies at room temperature in the spaces where they live. Many collectors of 16mm and 35mm motion pictures do likewise, lacking the resources for cold vault storage. As the data wheel demonstrates, the results of room temperature storage can be quite savage.

The data wheel enables users to determine the effects of their storage conditions upon the color life of their materials. With room temperature storage at 75F degrees and RH of 70 percent, the data wheel indicates that a 30 percent dye loss will occur in 15 years. But if the storage temperature can be lowered a mere ten degrees, keeping RH at the same level, it will take 30 years for a comparable dye loss to occur.

The data tabulated on the wheel assume that a film remains in dark storage, i.e., is never used. But obviously, films are taken out of their cans and screened, slides are projected, and photographs are examined in the light. When used, color materials are exposed to light and temperature changes. Because temperature is so critical to dye fading, the effects of usage, i.e., "time out of storage," must be factored in when calculating dye longevity. Accordingly, the data wheel is supplemented with a time-out-of-storage table that plots primary storage conditions (temperature and RH) against the average number of days each year the material spends out of storage. The result is the predicted time in years to reach 30 percent dye fading.

These calculations show that even limited exposure to warm temperatures negatively impacts the positive effects of cold storage. When calculating dye longevity in a dynamically changing environment, the time a film spends in warmer conditions must be weighed more heavily than its periods in cold storage. As Reilly notes ominously, "The warmer condition always has the greatest impact on overall life expectancy. The reason is simple: *dye fading may slow down in cold storage, but it never reverses itself.* Fading (and other forms of deterioration caused by spontaneous chemical reactions) is a journey down a one-way street. One month spent in warm temperatures takes a collection much farther down the road than many months in the cold." For film collectors or anyone with treasured color materials, this is a critical and sobering admonition.

Dye fading and other forms of deterioration affect every user of color photographic materials. The problems are endemic to the medium and are especially painful given the wealth of emotional and historical meanings our visual culture has entrusted to color photography. As the image degrades, so too do the meanings it has been entrusted to safeguard. In this context, the *Storage Guide* is an indispensable resource for anyone seeking to preserve his or her color photographic materials. It is clearly written and handsomely designed, and its data wheel tells users about the effects of different storage environments, enabling users to optimize their own storage conditions. Order forms for the publication can be found at the New York State Library web site at www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/storage.htm.

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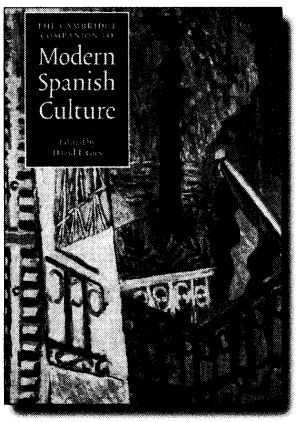

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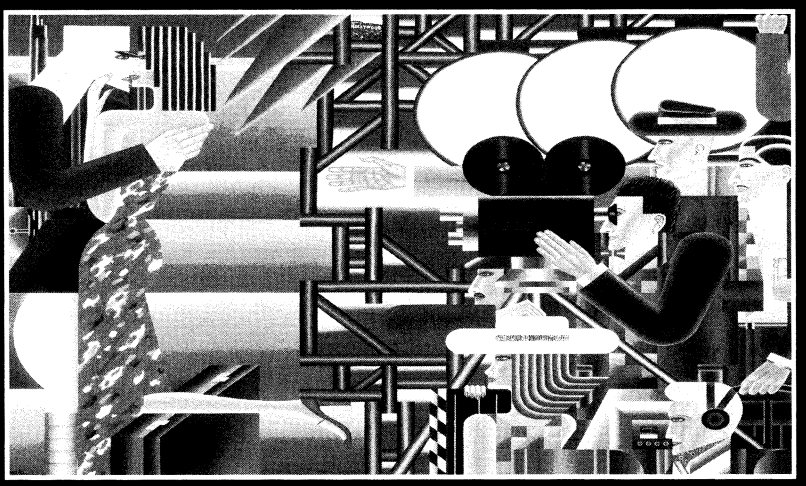

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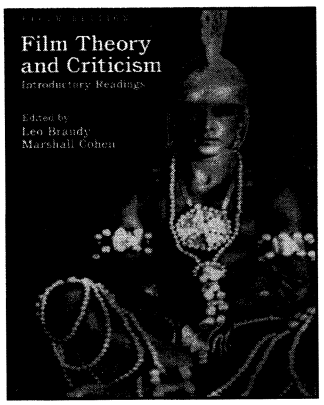

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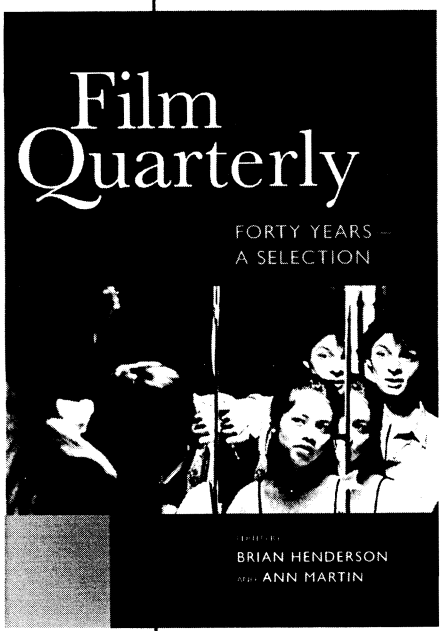

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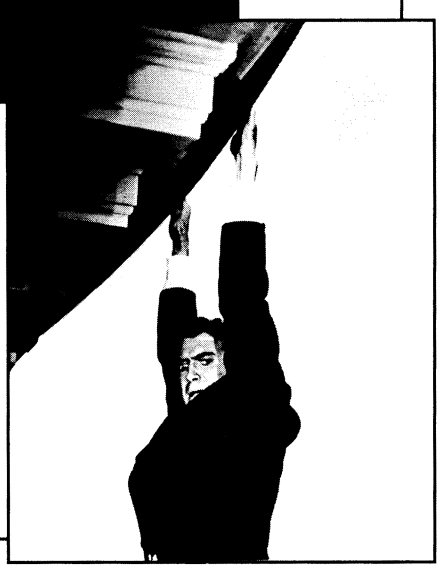

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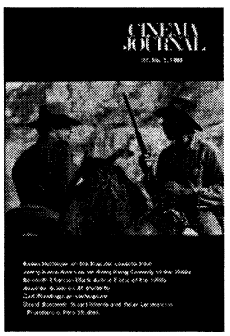

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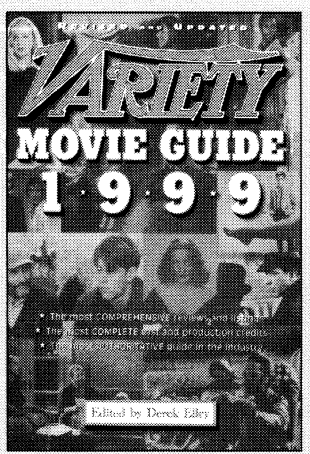

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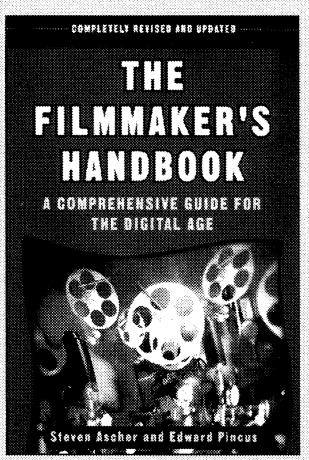

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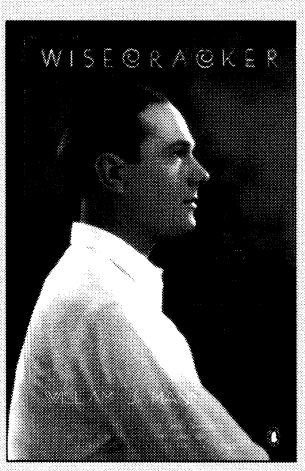

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